18 REVIEWS Anachronox...finally · WWII Online...virtually
PLUS: MS Train Sim · Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal

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The Sims' sexy secrets revealed

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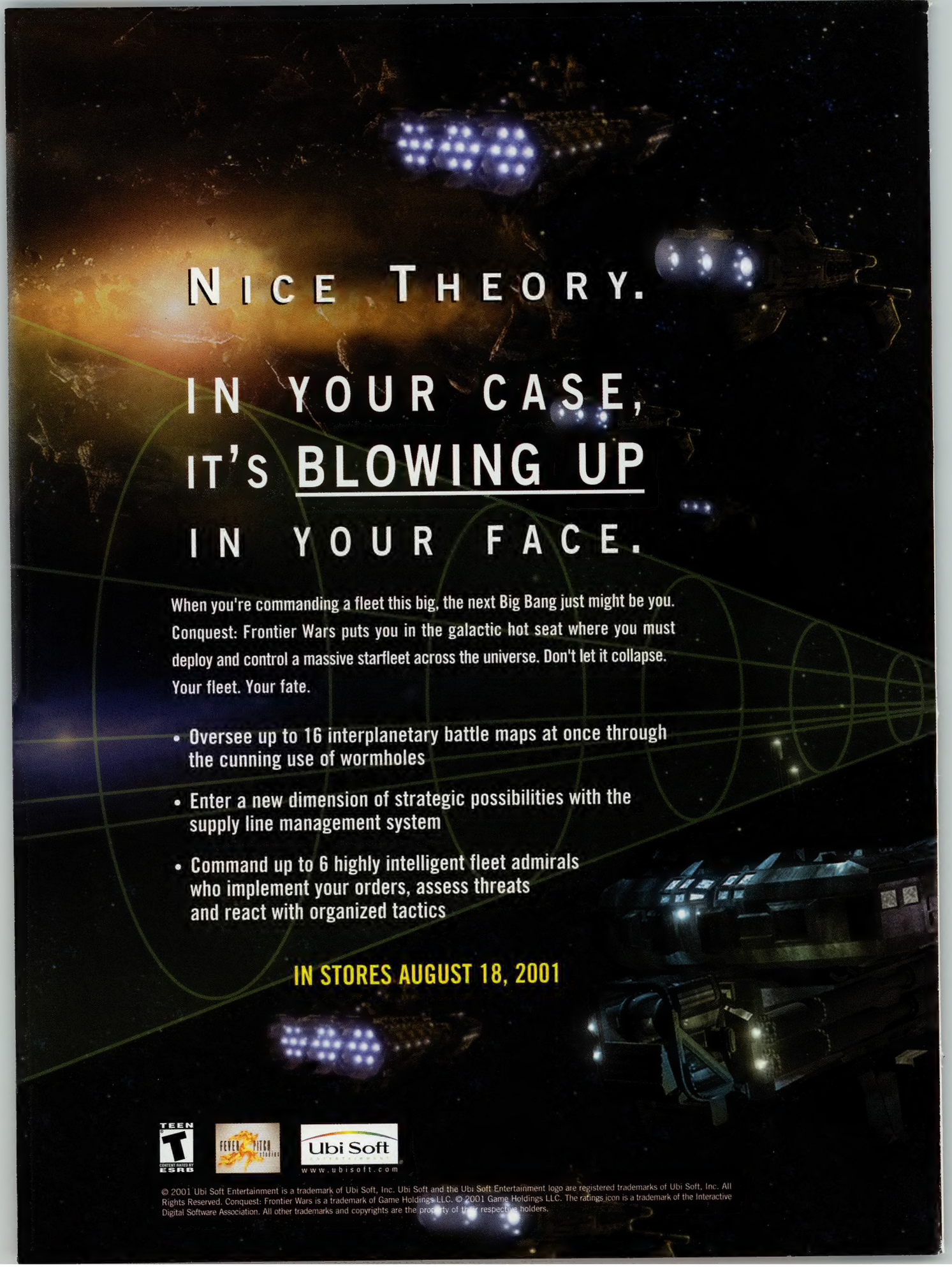
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EXCLUSIVE NEW SCREENS INSIDE

BLACK & WHITE MULTIPLAYER SECRETS
MYST III'S TOUGHEST PUZZLES
HALF-LIFE: BLUE SHIFT WALKTHROUGH


THE BIG BANG THEORY
AT THIS VERY SECOND
THE UNIVERSE
IS RAPIDLY
EXPANDING.
08:18:01:13


08:18:01:13
MU PRIME 36
"Who put this guy in charge?"
ATTENTION
FLEET ADMIRAL COMMAND
08:18:01:13
TAU CETI
"taking fire, need assistance!"
ATTENTION
FLEET ADMIRAL COMMAND
08:18:01:13
ALPHA CENTAURI- "Real slick, sir."
PHI PRIME- "THIS FLEET IS TOAST!"
08:18:01:13



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CONQUEST
FRONTIER WARS™

september 2001 volume 8 number 9

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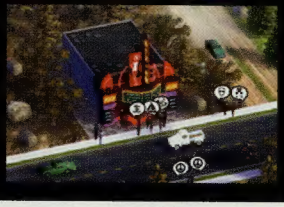


COVER STORY

16 The Sims Online

Will Wright takes his fiendishly addictive and successful sim game online for the first time. What will happen when thousands of Sims flood the Internet? With the building blocks supplied by Maxis, there's incredible potential for a diverse online community. Check out our exclusive in-depth story on this intriguing social experiment. We've also got the first look at the latest *Sims* expansion pack, *Hot Date*, which taps into the underbelly of Sim-ful relationships. And we tour *SimsVille*, the construction kit that mixes *SimCity*-like town building with the character interaction of *The Sims*.





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Duke's doing it. Lara's doing it. It looks like everyone is getting in on the whole webisodic game model. What's the deal, who are the players, and how will it affect the next time you buy a game? We give you all the answers.

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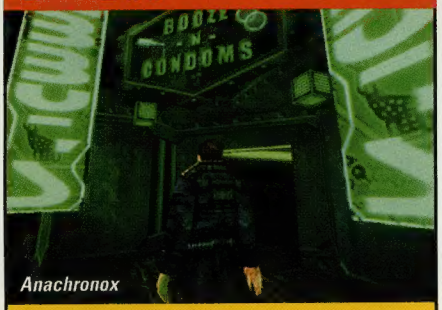
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

"Back home, they put me in jail for what I'm doing. Here, they give me awards."



Regular readers will have noticed that during my 18 months in the hot seat at *PC Gamer*, there have been a few tweaks to the look and feel of the different sections. Those improvements have been met with overwhelmingly positive comments. But for the last several months the entire team here has been working on giving the design of each section the thorough spring-cleaning that it needed, and it is with great pleasure that we unveil the new and improved *PC Gamer* with this issue.

The philosophy is simple: giving you more. We want to ensure that you get more information in the reviews, with informative captions and sidebars that will enhance your enjoyment of reading the section and supply that insightful buying advice on which you've come to depend; we want the Scoops section to feel as special, fun-filled, and compelling as our first-look previews always are; we want Eyewitness to get the dirt on stories you're interested in reading; we want fewer pictures of Vederman.

The Hard Stuff section has received a long-overdue makeover that now lets us give scores to the gadgets and gizmos currently causing a fire hazard in the *PC Gamer* office. Read Greg's description of the modifications that will help you decide what gear to buy on page 111.

As our updated and ongoing coverage of the biggest games continues, the Inside Gaming section of Scoops makes its debut. Here you'll get the latest, greatest screenshots, detailed information on design decisions, and true insight into the game-making process from the stars at the bleeding edge of our industry.

So, let me know what you think of the new look. Hopefully, the redesign will better convey the enthusiasm, style, and gusto with which we look at games — the same way you do.

And some parts stay the same, such as the quote contest. Congratulations to Morgan Goulet for spotting the line from *Young Frankenstein* in August's issue. As usual, tell me which movie the quote atop this column comes from, and you could win some junk from the *PC Gamer* bargain bin of gaming goodness. As always, send entries, comments, thoughts, and pearls of wisdom to *ednote@pcgamer.com*.

Rob Smith

Rob Smith
Editor-in-Chief

THERE'S NOTHING CONVENTIONAL ABOUT IT.

Plunge back into intense World War II combat with the most realistic tactical and strategic action game ever created. Maneuver Sergeant "Tiny" McHale and his elite squad of soldiers deep behind enemy lines utilizing their combined expertise to set up ambushes, control troops and conduct night missions.

Interact like never before with detailed environments based on actual WWII locations. Go covert into the heart of the Third Reich, defend a Northern European submarine installation, and infiltrate the headquarters of the Japanese Army.

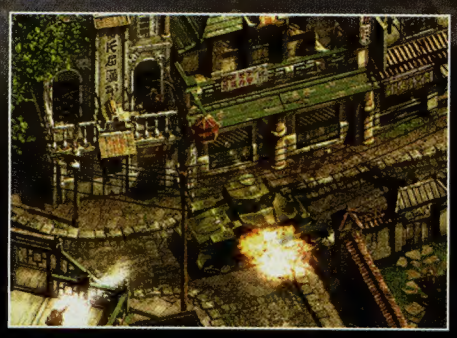
New 3D engine offers a 360° rotatable environment and seamless movement in/out of buildings, submarines, planes and under water.

Complete simultaneous control of multiple gameplay windows in real time.

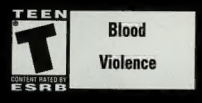
New commandos include a thief, a seductress, and a dog – adding stealth, distraction and distribution strategies.

Go into battles with others in a cooperative multiplayer mode.









Blood
Violence

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Future waste disposal technology in *Tribes 2*?

AS A MATTER OF CRAP...

After reading July's letters section, I realized that you guys have the knowledge to answer those really tough questions about videogame characters. What I want to know is, How do the characters in *Tribes 2* go to the restroom? The heavies always seem to be hopping around like they're about to pee themselves, but I don't see how they can get all that slick armor off in time to relieve themselves. And where do they go to the bathroom when they *do* get it off? Playing *Counter-Strike*, you usually see some toilets or bathrooms, but not in *Tribes*!

— Timothy Hines, via email

It turns out that the suits themselves convert all waste products into fuel that's used by the jet packs. That's why the really gassy guys are able to spend more time in the air. Many combatants eat large amounts of broccoli, cheese, and refried beans before going into battle. True story.

DAILY RADAR'S DEMISE

What happened to *Daily Radar*? When it shut down, the staff made an announcement on the site listing numerous reasons for the closure. All of these reasons were supposed to be humorous — and a few actually were. However, none of them gave any real insight into why *Daily Radar* actually went under.

I loved *Daily Radar*. It was funny, and it had funny pictures, funny random weekly things, and a hell of a lot of information on every gaming platform under the sun. So what happened? It seemed to be a very successful website.

— Jon Quarfoth, via email

There were many reasons for the closure, Jon. Most of them were the same business decisions that have seen incredibly prominent Internet properties bite the dust over the last few months. There isn't one simple, defining answer.

But while Daily Radar*'s demise has affected* pcgamer.com*'s updates, there's good news ahead. In late July we'll be relaunching a new* pcgamer.com *complete with all the expected features, including a complete archive of our reviews, past columns from our esteemed contributors, and the forums that have developed into a thriving community. And we'll have plenty more, too. So while* Daily Radar *will be greatly missed,* pcgamer.com *will be more than able to satiate your online fix.*

A COLORFUL COLLECTION OF COLLECTIBLES

I've been an avid reader of *PC Gamer* since the very start. I live and die by your reviews because I almost always agree with your verdicts. I still have every single issue, but what am I going to do with them? Do you think I could get something for them on eBay? Heck, I even have every demo disk(c) (floppies and CDs) except for one.

To be honest, I really don't want to sell my collection, as I love your magazine too much. I'm tellin' you, though, one day my *PC Gamer* stack will rank right up there with rare stamp collections!

— James Volin, via email

Wow, that's awesome that you've kept all of our issues, James! That means a lot to all of us. Don't sell any of 'em until they're worth enough to make you rich! (And which disc are you missing?)

OOPS!

The French Char B1? Nope, it's the British Cruiser Mark IV. We should have known — after all, it's not abandoned.



You morons! On page 29 of the July issue, you refer to a British Char B1 tank as being in *WWII Online*. The Char B1 was a *French* tank. In fact, the French expression for tank is "char."

Don't try to diss me in your response, either. I have a tank and I know where your office is! It's a T34/85, and it drives through walls really nicely.

— Hans Beerbaum
West Coast Armor and Artillery Museum
Petaluma, CA



Cruiser Mark IV



Char B1



T34/85

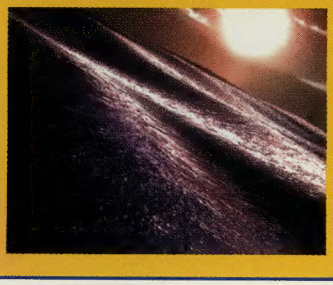
Ha. Wrong. Our office is a two-story, dull beige building that doesn't move anywhere and can't drive through walls, even if we tried (and we have). So stick that in your...yeah, whatever, you got us. Thanks for pointing out the goof. As you probably know, the tank in question was actually a Cruiser Mark IV.

I noticed that in your review of *The War of 1812* you stated that the battle at New Orleans was what provided the inspiration for the Star-Spangled Banner. First off, it was the siege of Baltimore that "contributed" this inspiration, and secondly, the battle at New Orleans occurred *after* the war ended.

— Tom Leszczyk, via email

Well, what do you expect with a Brit in charge?

Win Cool Expensive Stuff *KILLER SCREENSAVER CONTEST*



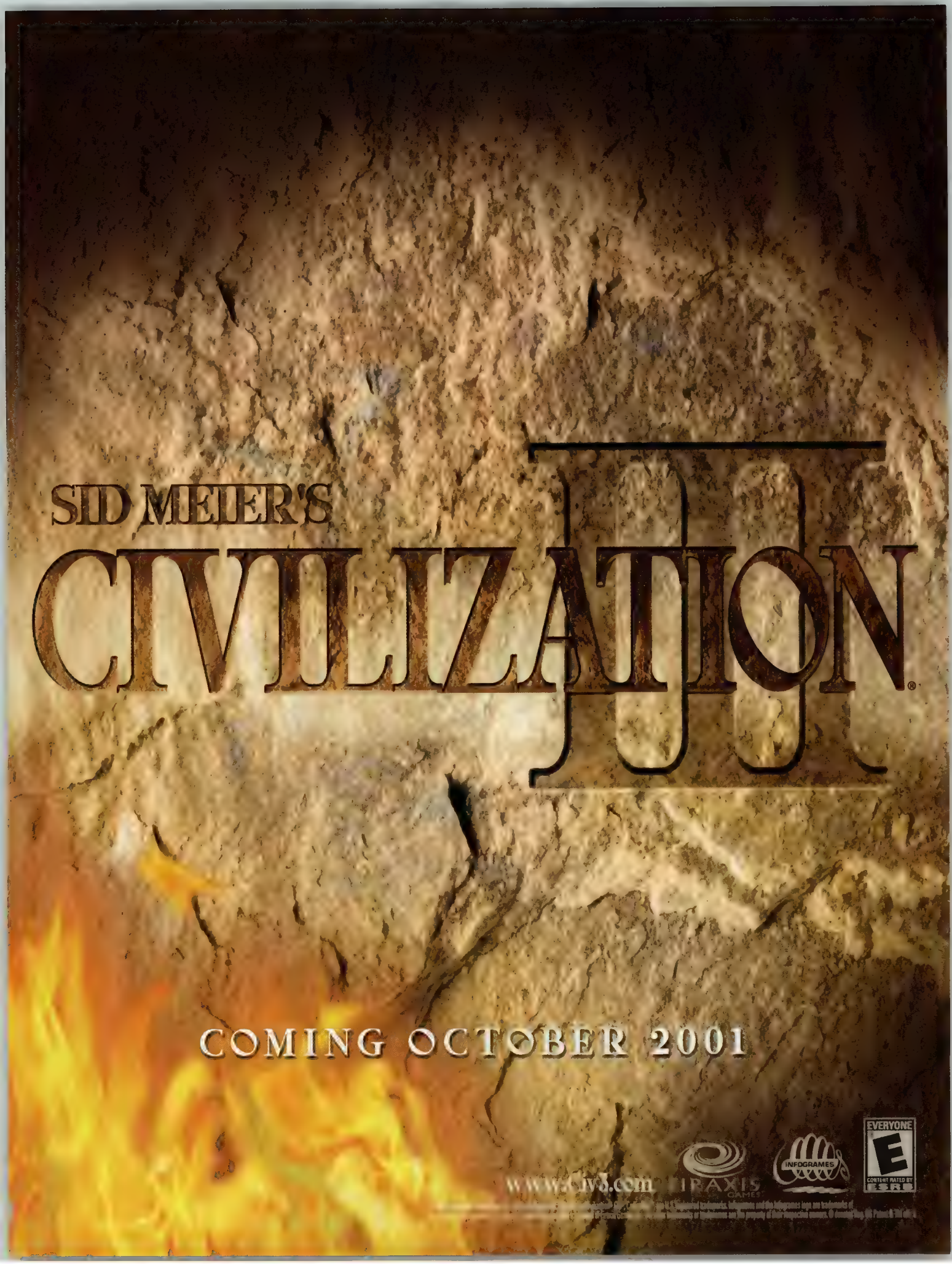
PC Gamer, in cooperation with AMD, Microsoft, and NVIDIA, is hosting the most intense screensaver competition of all time. We will award a dream AMD box, an MSDN Pro bundle, a compiler, and loads of Microsoft hardware to the winner, and two runners-up will each receive a GeForce3 card. If you have a knack for coding, read on!

The challenge is to create the best water effect possible on GeForce3 hardware. All entries will build from a Microsoft screensaver shell available on the contest site. The screensaver must be written for DirectX 8, scale its complexity to the system it's running on, and use pixel and/or vertex shaders and hardware T&L. The rest is left to your imagination.

Entries are due by Oct. 30, 2001, and will be judged by the organizers and industry personalities. Complete rules, regulations, rating criteria, prize information, and judge biographies are available on the contest web site.

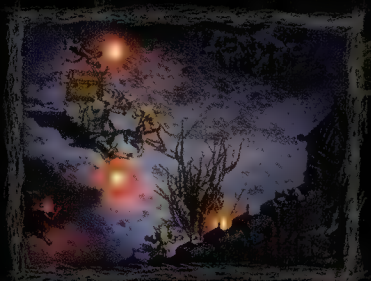
Good luck! If this contest is well-received, we'll host a similar competition every three months!

FOR DETAILS VISIT
www.pcgamer.com/screensavercontest


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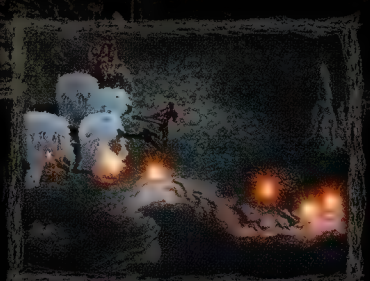




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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

MATURE (17+)
Animated Violence
Animated Blood and Gore

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The Sims Online

Want to make your own Sim-world? This massively multiplayer *Sims* experience will be exactly how *you* design it to be...with a little prodding and a construction set courtesy of Game God designer Will Wright.

The Sims became an honest-to-goodness cultural phenomenon when it arrived last year to multi-million unit sales and mainstream adulation. It sat on top of PC Data's bestseller list for months (eventually joined by a long-running No. 2 entry, *The Sims Livin' Large* expansion pack), and the game even pulled the cross-media coup of a primetime TV parody on *The Drew Carey Show*. Indeed, in the most recent NPD Intelect figures, *all three Sims* titles (*The Sims*, *Livin' Large*, and the recently released *House Party* add-on) are among the top 10 best-selling PC games — an impressive achievement.

Will Wright, creator of this phenomenon, didn't sit on his laurels, though — not even for a week. The lead designer of 2000's most innovative and appealing game didn't seem to take any kind of vacation at all before turning his attention to an equally ambitious project — *The Sims Online*, a massively multiplayer game that aims to bring the uniquely *Sims*-ian experience to a persistent, shared online world.

It's an online world as iconoclastically devoid of goals as the strange sandbox Maxis delivered with *The Sims*. You won't find any wars to fight, no realms under threat, none of the usual objectives around which online games are typically organized. All you'll face are the eight basic needs of a modern Sim's life — hygiene,

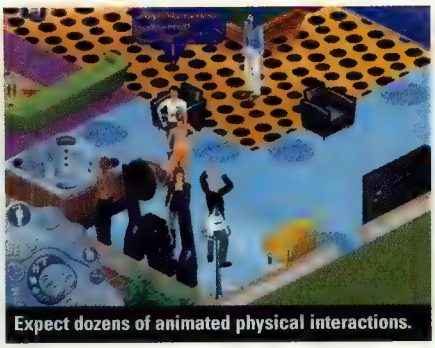
F.Y.I.



CATEGORY: Simulation
DEVELOPER: Maxis
PUBLISHER: EA Games
eagames.ea.com
PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 50%
RELEASE DATE: Mid-2002

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL? ***The Sims*** **was the biggest-selling game of 2000, and it was also one of the most innovative. Now Maxis is taking the phenomenon online to open up a persistent *Sims* world.**

DEVELOPER'S TRACK RECORD
Maxis has one of the industry's most enviable résumés. The *SimCity* series remains a landmark, and *The Sims* (and its add-ons) continues to be a huge popular success.



Expect dozens of animated physical interactions.



Female characters will have several fun responses ready for unwanted advances

hunger, comfort, bladder, energy, fun, room, and socializing, and the other elements that made up *The Sims*' basic hierarchy of needs. The rest is almost literally entirely up to you and your thousands of fellow world-dwellers.

The gameplay mechanics are simple and direct. You create a Sim at the start (with a maximum of three on one account), much as you do in the original game, but this time you have fewer variables to worry about ("We're after a very casual player, so we want this to be really easy," says Wright). Then you need to find some roommates.

The Sims Online will do everything in its designers' power to force you into social situations, beginning with your living environment. Up to three Sims can initially cohabitate in a house, and your initial challenge will be to link up with compatible roomies. You can find out who might be a good fit by studying their Sim profiles: if you're a neat freak, you'll probably want to steer clear of untidy Sims, for example.

Once you've got roomies (possibly your own friends and family members), there will be an obvious need to compromise and accommodate. But if things aren't working out, there's always the "vote 'em off" option as well — if two roommates are displeased with a third, they can gang up to kick the bad egg from the house. Not contributing enough cash to keep the place filled with plasma TVs? You could be bounced.

And as far as the rest of the world goes, you'll be free to interact with your fellow Sims in just about any way you please. You can amuse, dance, slap, tear the heart out of a Sim and stomp on it — there are hundreds of individual animated interactions. All the while, you'll be typing text to fill the word balloon over your Sim's head.

And that's more or less all there is to the gameplay mechanics. You can buy, build, and use things just as with *The Sims*, but in this new social order, you're very much on your own to establish what *The Sims Online* will be about — and that's just the way Wright wants it.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

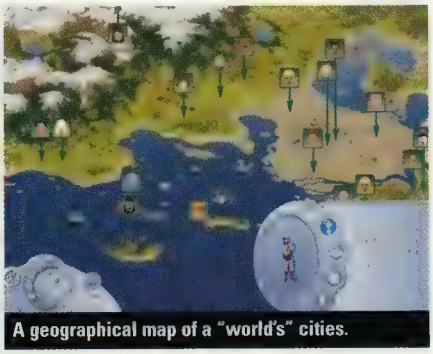
"We'd like the world to be thematically empty when it first comes out," says Wright. "Every player will start out with enough money for a lot of the basics, like a house and furnishings, but from there they'll be totally on their own."

The Sims Online will be more like four games in one — presenting four different tracks to growth and success, each designed to appeal and cater to a different sort of gamer. (See the "Four Games in One" boxout at left.) Depending on what you're most interested in spending your time doing, you can devote yourself to the pursuit of wealth, the increasing of your popularity, the construction of magnificent projects, or the simple Usenet-tested activity known as hobnobbing.

The online world will feature a vast accounting system to keep track of almost



The "friendship web" interface.



A geographical map of a "world's" cities.

FOUR GAMES IN ONE

Will Wright estimates that most gamers will follow one of four paths in *The Sims Online* (though you can play them all if you like). Which best describes you?:

The Paper Chase: There's always the endless pursuit of greenbacks (better known to *Sims* fans as "Simoleons"). The drive to create wealth can be the focus of your Sim.



The Popularity Contest: Another way to advance in prestige is to court popular opinion. Build an extensive social network and watch your fame rise on the game's list of Most Popular Sims.

The Builder's Quest: It's also possible to play the game with no other desire than to build up "lots" with the biggest, most intricate structures you can imagine. Construct a legacy...build the Hearst Castle of Sim-land!

The Social Butterfly: Finally, you might not care about getting on any of the Top Lists, and might just use *The Sims Online* as a virtual social world. In a Usenet-like structure, mix and mingle with like-minded folks, create online social clubs, or just play poker with your homeys down at the local casino. Any way you choose to spend your time will be for the fun of social interaction.

The Sims has sold 2,300,000 copies and generated a gross revenue of $95,200,000 (through May 2001), reports NPD Intelect.



You'll find playable mini-games in which you can take on other Sims. Stratego time!



Your chance to be a scumbag boss.

every conceivable in-game total: you'll be able to see the total number of slaps a person has received, the number of kisses they've received, the number of fights they've pitched into. If you're one of the world's most-kissed or most-slapped citizens, you'll be ranked on a Top List so that everyone can watch your fame (or shame) accumulate on the in-game Top List interface.

Moolah is the great motivator of life, and you'll be able to spend all your Sim-days chasing after the big payday if you're so inclined. The game will offer as many as 20 career tracks, plus the ability to go into business for yourself and even hire other players' Sims as your employees.

"There will be profit-making machines that take multiple Sims to operate," says producer Jade Raymond. "You'll need to find other Sims with complementary skills to successfully figure out a puzzle. If you can all do it, then you all get money for it."

Every Sim has certain skills that they can develop over time. (For example, increasing your "body" skill may be easy as taking a quick trip to the gym.) And when it comes to business, you'll want to develop your skills in a hurry: try to operate a machine requiring a body skill, an engineering skill, and a computer skill at an ability level of zero and that's exactly what you'll get — zero dollars.

Wright acknowledged a potential for *The Sims Online* to produce some real-world financial transactions. You could make money playing the game through, say, other people paying to know you so that their popularity increases.

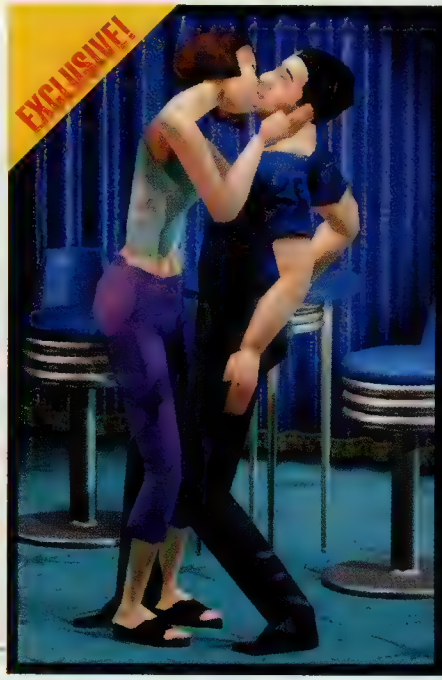
Other ways to earn those Simoleons: charge a cover price for people to enter your lot (build a unique and popular attraction with the generic structure-design tools, for example, and you can set the dollar amount for Sims to enter); split the proceeds of your casino operation with the other Sim-owners; or build and sell a plethora of custom-made items (more on this process in a bit).

MORE TO LIFE THAN MONEY?

Then again, it's perfectly okay to be disinterested in the rat race. Money isn't everything, right? Maybe the popularity game will be more your speed. On this track, your Sim gains prestige as he or she becomes more popular with other Sims.

Popularity is tracked by your social web — displayed as an actual interface like

NPD Intelect figures (through May 2001) also show that *The Sims Livin' Large* has sold 963,000 copies, *The Sims House Party* has sold 321,000 copies...



The Sims Hot Date

A new expansion pack heats up *The Sims*

Remember your first kiss? The sweaty palms, your mutual uncertainty about knowing where to put your hands and nose, and the way that time stood still as the rest of the human race blipped out of existence for a short eternity? Well, that's the same moment of anticipation that Maxis wants to capture in *Hot Date*, the latest expansion pack for *The Sims*.

Focusing on sim-romance, *Hot Date* is about going on the perfect date — creating a series of magic moments guaranteed to get you a high "score," or maybe even a permanent relationship.

For the first time ever, this expansion will upgrade your version of *The Sims* with all-new locales for wining and dining. Though *Hot Date* had been in development for only three weeks when we saw it this June, producer Tim LeTourneau took us on a tour of an early mock-up of a working restaurant, disco, and flower shop that the team built in just three days (and which was, graphically, very similar to the upcoming *SimsVille*).



After arriving at the restaurant by taxi, LeTourneau showed us how the waitress will automatically bring menus and take orders, while at the same time other couples are dropping by for a bite or dancing next door. Other locations like theaters and drive-ins are being considered as well.

LeTourneau emphasizes that *Hot Date* won't be a separate game experience but will naturally mesh into *The Sims*' existing gameplay, offering new locations to visit along with new possible interactions. The project is so ambitious, though, that Maxis is hiring a crew of 12 to 14 new staff members to work exclusively on *Hot Date* — something that wasn't necessary for the two previous add-ons.

Expect *The Sims Hot Date* in stores by Thanksgiving 2001.



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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence
Blood and Gore

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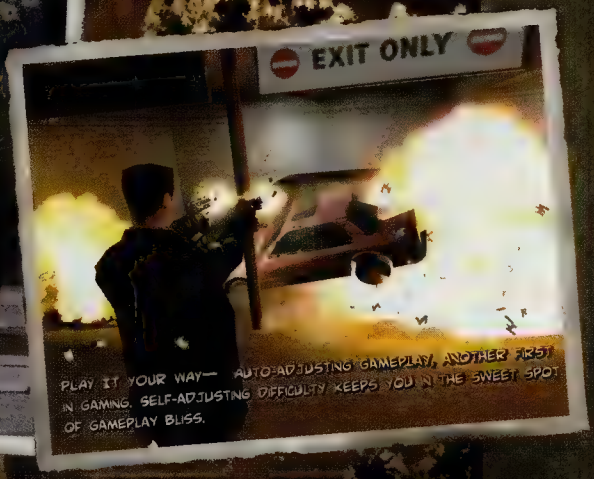
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ACTUAL SCREEN SHOT







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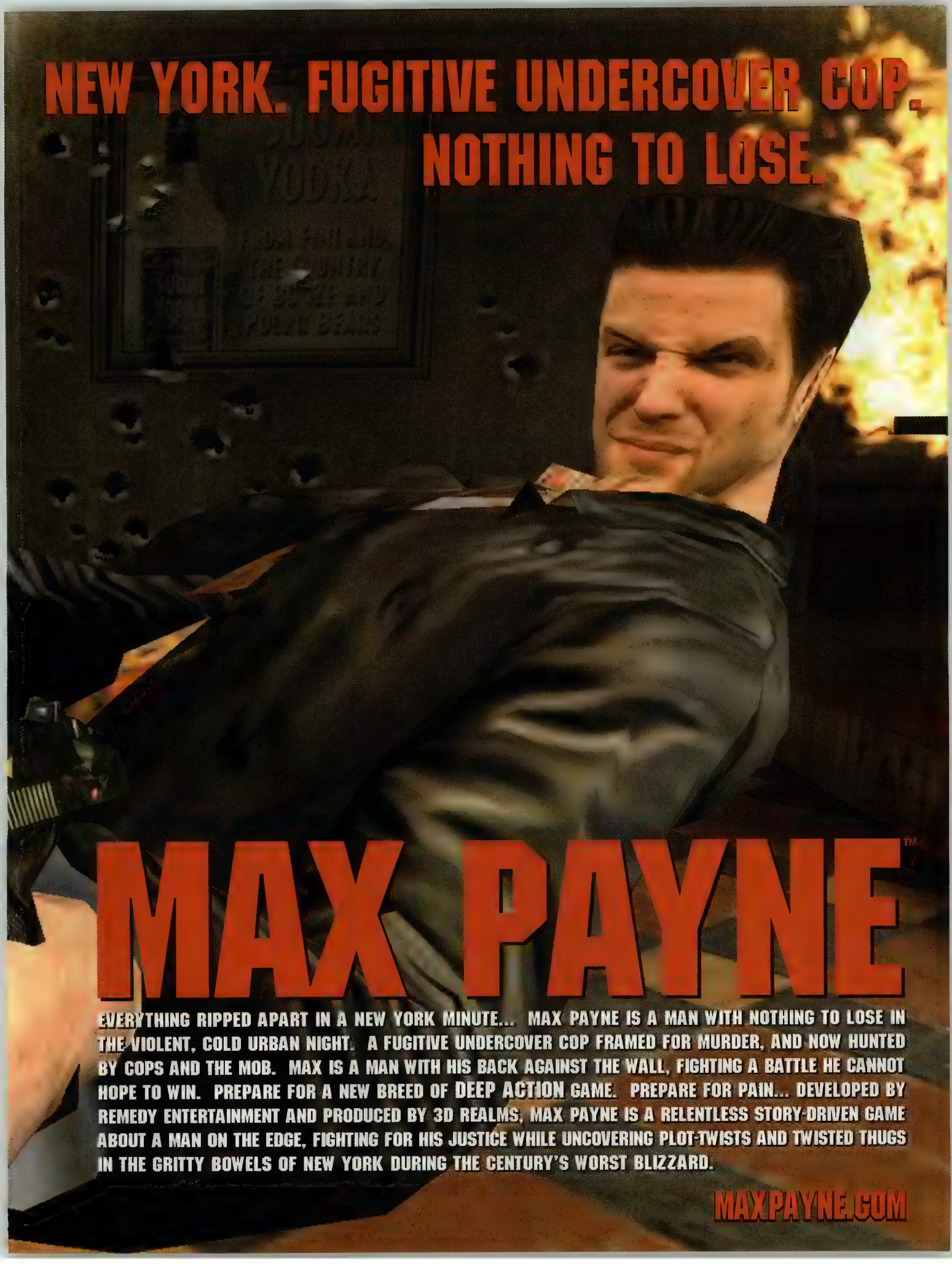
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MAXPAYNE.COM



Needless to say, love and marriage will be part of *Sims Online*.



Money-making puzzles will require teamwork and different skills.

a network hub, showing your connections and friendships across the Simscape. "It'll be a sort of *Six Degrees of Separation* for all Sims...you can see who knows who, and track the social networks of everyone in the world," says Wright. An "Interest Radar" will give you a visual cue to the compatibility of other Sims you meet — for example, a light bulb will appear over your head if you hit it off.

Other popularity-minded Sims will seek you out, as exposure to a popular Sim increases one's own popularity rating. Wright chuckles as he imagines the necessary consequences: "Being popular can be its own particular hell. Everyone will want to hang out with you."

However, the most enterprising Sims can also use popularity to their financial advantage. There's nothing stopping you from charging others for the pleasure of your company, allowing someone who's been busy playing the economic game to jump up the social ladder for a nominal fee.

Another route to personal fulfillment will be construction and lot design. Wright's plan is to provide players with a generic toolkit of "building blocks" from which to assemble all manner of structures. You can work on a continually evolving dream home, build a succession of cash- and popularity-earning attractions, or just seed the world with fun structural curiosities.

Working from the basic building block of a "lot" — a paid-for vacant piece of the world — you can construct almost any kind of functional building from a generic set of conveyor belts, ladders, and other simple structural tools. "You can turn your lot into a game show," says Wright, "or an amusement park with rides built from conveyor belts. The idea is to give you the basic blocks and then just see what you can come up with."

Certain "sets" will offer deep functionality. The casino is a great early example: You'll actually be able to play poker, blackjack, and various other games there, as well as man the blackjack tables to be the dealer.

Allegedly — and we say allegedly because for the moment we've got only Wright's word for it — you'll be able to fabricate an almost limitless variety of attractions of your own, and then track the popularity of your structure within the game world.

Eventually, Maxis will incorporate user-created items in the game as well. If you conceive of a rare item that other Sims will shell out money for, you can build it and sell it (either wholesale to department stores or at retail from your own lot). The idea is for a working economy to develop of its own accord, with supply and demand dictating the flow of goods between industrious Sims and consumers.



As bosses and employees, players will convene to cooperatively run businesses.

CASINO ROYALE



Want a sure-fire route to Sim-success? Put together a casino. With playable mini-games ranging from blackjack to slots, you and your business partners can charge fellow Sims to play, and then take a cut of every transaction. You know what casino operators say, right? "In the end, we get it all. The players don't stand a chance."

Additionally, a built-in utility in the game will allow you to download user-created skins from the game's central server. So, while Maxis can't provide you with a copyrighted Batman or Homer Simpson skin, someone out there probably can.

GOOD GRIEF

"We learned a lot from studying the *Ultima* community," says Wright. "We're lucky in that we can apply some of the lessons learned there about grief play."

"Grief play" is a term Maxis uses to describe problems caused by users who are intent on screwing up the experience for everyone else. Let's face it: in any online world, you're at the mercy of thousands of strangers, and a certain number of them are *not* committed to the fullest enjoyment of the game.

Luckily, *The Sims Online* will provide several powerful tools to counteract grief players. For starters, a powerful Ignore feature will shut out all of a player's written text and deny him/her the ability to interact physically with your Sim. You'll also have hold of "profile warnings" to alert you when you might be about to experience mature content, so that you can head off in a different direction if you're not up for it.

If a problem player has wandered into your house or lot, you can set the house to Kick him and he'll never be able to enter again. If worse comes to worst, you can look for help from one of the patrolling NPC administrators — the current plan is to give EA admins a "robot" skin and let them serve as walking, talking resources for newbies.

SIMS OF A FEATHER

The Sims Online will be divided into "worlds" of about 5,000 players each at launch, and these will appear as navigable geographical maps. As cities and neighborhoods arise, they'll appear on the map with names of their own. Initially, the game will have 30 cities, with each one holding 50,000 lots for building to meet the needs of the ever-expanding populace.

Wright expects neighborhoods to be themed around the shared interests of new players. "It'll probably look like the movie *Westworld*," he says, "with an Old West town, a science-fiction town, you name it — whatever people decide they want to do."

One thing that won't happen will be an effort on the part of Maxis to establish any pre-determined organization. "This is really a big social experiment," says Wright.

He makes reference to the emergence of Usenet, which organized around broad topics (say, "science fiction") before splintering into smaller communities (to continue the example, "*Star Wars*" or "*Star Trek*"). Wright anticipates many new players using the game's elaborate search functions to seek out communities of like-minded people, establishing neighborhoods and even towns modeled around interest themes.

"We'll probably see neighborhoods spring up as science-fiction areas in general, and then splinter off into subgroups," he says. "Eventually, there will probably be a large *Star Wars* neighborhood and a large *Star Trek* neighborhood and the general science-fiction area will have subsided, just like with Usenet."

The focus on neighborhoods will even cross over into the economic model of the game as well. You'll be rewarded for doing business locally, as there will be shipping charges for importing items from other cities or neighborhoods.

Wright bluntly anticipates that it will be a small percentage of obsessed *Sims Online* players who will be the ones generating most of the entertainment value for everyone else.

"What we saw with *The Sims* was a web community of some dedicated people who churned out a ton of content, and they made it more fun for everyone else," says Wright. "We'll probably have 5 percent of *The Sims Online* players building the world for the other 95 percent to enjoy browsing."

EA plans to go live with a large public beta (5,000 players or so) early next year and release the game at retail in mid-2002. *The Sims Online* will ship as a retail boxed product and then EA will charge a monthly subscription fee "along the lines of existing models," which means about $10 per month.

Given the sales of *The Sims* and its expansion packs, it's pretty reasonable to expect *The Sims Online* to have huge appeal. Will it be the first truly mainstream massively multiplayer game? We'd say it's "Sim"-ply inevitable.

— Dan Morris



Build a SimCity, then populate it with living, striving Sims in the upcoming *SimsVille*.

Now Entering SimsVille

What do you get when you cross *The Sims* with *SimCity*? Find out.

Yet another addition to the flourishing Sims phenomenon is *SimsVille*, currently under development at Maxis. This forthcomer seeks to blend the household gameplay of *The Sims* with the more traditional town-building elements of the original *SimCity*.

You'll construct a city just as you're used to doing — laying roads, choosing stores to build, and making sure services are running smoothly. But in addition, you'll have the ability to zoom down to a house-level view to monitor the day-to-day social activities of the Sims in your town.

That's because neighbor interactions will be a big part of the overall success of your city. If people are getting along, the town is a nice place to live. But if relationships are souring and fences are going up, it will gum up the works for the whole community.

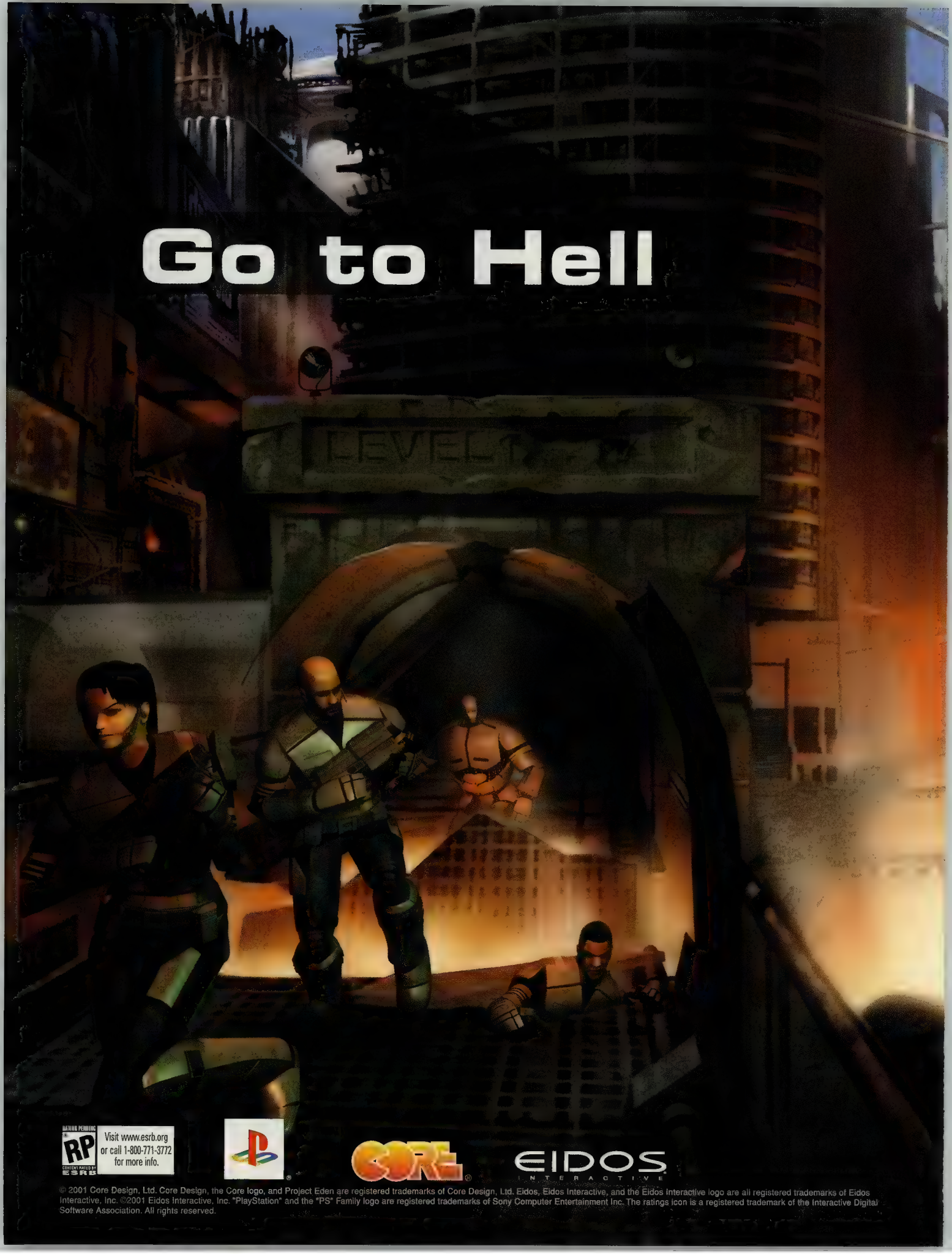
"If neighbors are getting on each other's nerves," says producer Virginia McArthur, "they might start throwing their trash in each other's yards. It could get ugly."

McArthur anticipates that players will initially split their time 50-50 between town layout and people management. But her goal is for gameplay to shift gradually toward the social side, as the town matures and the relationships of its inhabitants take center stage.

"Ideally, we'd like to see an eventual 70-30 split toward the household game," she says.

SimsVille is tentatively set for an end-of-year release.

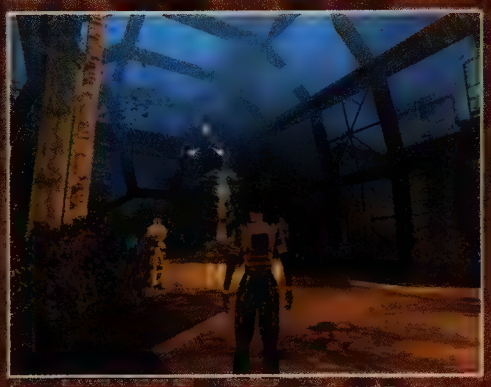
...SimCity 2000 has sold 1,200,000 copies, *SimCity 3000* has sold 1,100,000 copies, *SimTower* has sold 452,000 copies, and *The Streets of SimCity* has sold 121,000 copies.



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PROJECT EDEN

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Combat Mission 2



FACT: Best estimates suggest that the Soviet Union suffered 13.6 million military and 7.7 million civilian casualties over the course of World War II.

IN A NUTSHELL The eagerly awaited sequel to the most successful and innovative "indie" wargame of all time.



***Combat Mission*'s graphics quality helped it appeal to more than just wargamers. And *CM2* (shown) will look even better.**

By the summer of 2000, wargames had become a cranky, inbred, and psychologically besieged genre. The big-name developers who had nourished and sustained the category since the mid-'80s were now owned by larger, less committed corporate entities whose bean-counters had concluded that hardcore wargames simply were not profitable enough to justify their cost of development.

There was much speculation about a new, rather nebulous, business paradigm — internet-based, independently produced games that would be commercially viable due to their low overhead costs. But no one knew if this scheme would actually *work*. Moreover, many gamers were skeptical about the quality and production values of such games.



German infantry: Eat lead, you goose-stepping book burners!

Then, in June 2000, Big Time Software and Battlefront.com weighed in with *Combat Mission: Beyond Overlord*, and the genre suddenly entered a renaissance that continues, in full vigor, to this day.

CM broke the mold. It combined really cool 3D graphics, intense real-time action, and turn-based depth, all in one elegant package. It rocked the wargaming world and ignited a vital creative spark in many other indie projects — and it sold like hotcakes. Big Time won't say exactly how many copies have been sold to date, but co-designer Charles Moylan says, "We are *very* happy about the numbers."

In time-honored grognard tradition, Big Time was immediately deluged with fans' suggestions about how to improve the sequel (nobody ever doubted there would *be* one). "The problem," explains Moylan, "was the sheer number of good ideas. Individually, nearly all of them were worthy of inclusion, but implementing all the good ones would have added two full years to development time."

So for *CM2*, Big Time cut down the list to a "reasonable core" of indispensable features. Among the most exciting:

- New movement types: Move to Contact, Assault, Human Wave, and Hull-Down.
- A new in-game graphical interface.
- An "Extreme" Fog of War option: You get even less information about enemy units, and even when you get close, the information still won't be complete.
- Variable battle-length options: Battles can last a few turns beyond the "stated" ending. Furthermore, if victory flags change hands shortly before the battle is set to end, the battle automatically extends several turns — the old "end-game-flag-rush" tactic (which was always a bit too "gamey") simply won't work anymore.
- Purchase Point Rarity Option: "We looked at the historical availability of units in the games, for every month from June 1941 to May 1945, and the rarity option now applies a multiplier to the point cost for all units, with high costs for the less common ones. This leads to much more realistic force allocations. Panzer IV tanks are common, so their multipliers are low. King Tigers are rare, so they're much more expensive, even beyond the price you already pay for the extra combat power."
- Most vehicles can now be purchased in platoons, and they're subject to the same command and control rules as infantry. Tanks with radios now become very advantageous.

Most exciting of all, though, is the nature and scope of *CM2*. It *will* be an "East Front" game, and it will be *huge*. "It will cover Barbarossa to Berlin, from the German invasion in June 1941 to the fall of Berlin, and *every* campaign in between."

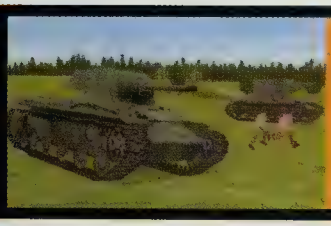
No release date is specified because Big Time hews to its original guiding principle: "We'll ship it when it's ready, and not one day before." But, informally, they're aiming for late this year or early 2002.

For this game's legion of passionate fans, that day cannot come soon enough.

— William R. Trotter

Battlefront.com was born on the back of a paper napkin in a local watering hole.

F.Y.I.



CATEGORY: Wargame
DEVELOPER: Big Time Software
PUBLISHER: Battlefront.com
www.battlefront.com
PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 45%
RELEASE DATE: Early 2002

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL?: ***Combat Mission 2*** **will be prettier, *much* bigger, and far more ambitious than its illustrious predecessor. And it'll move the action to WWII gamers' favorite arena: the Russian Front.**

DEVELOPER'S TRACK RECORD: **Co-designers Charles Moylan and Steve Grammont had a major indie hit with *CM*. Moylan's other credits include *Flight Commander*, *Over the Reich*, and *Achtung Spitfire!***

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW:

EarthLink DSL

USER RATING

Speed	★★★★★
Connectivity	★★★★★
Ease of Use	★★★★★
Reliability	★★★★★
Support	★★★★★

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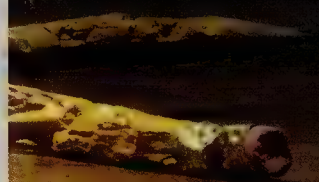
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Iron Storm



FACT: The front-line trenches of WWI were usually seven feet deep and six feet wide. Dugouts further away from the front could go 15 meters below ground.

IN A NUTSHELL World War I meets the 1960s in this impressive new FPS battleground.

One of 4X's literary inspirations for *Iron Storm* was *The Man in the High Castle*, a Philip K. Dick novel about an alternate Earth in which Germany and Japan won World War II and occupied America.

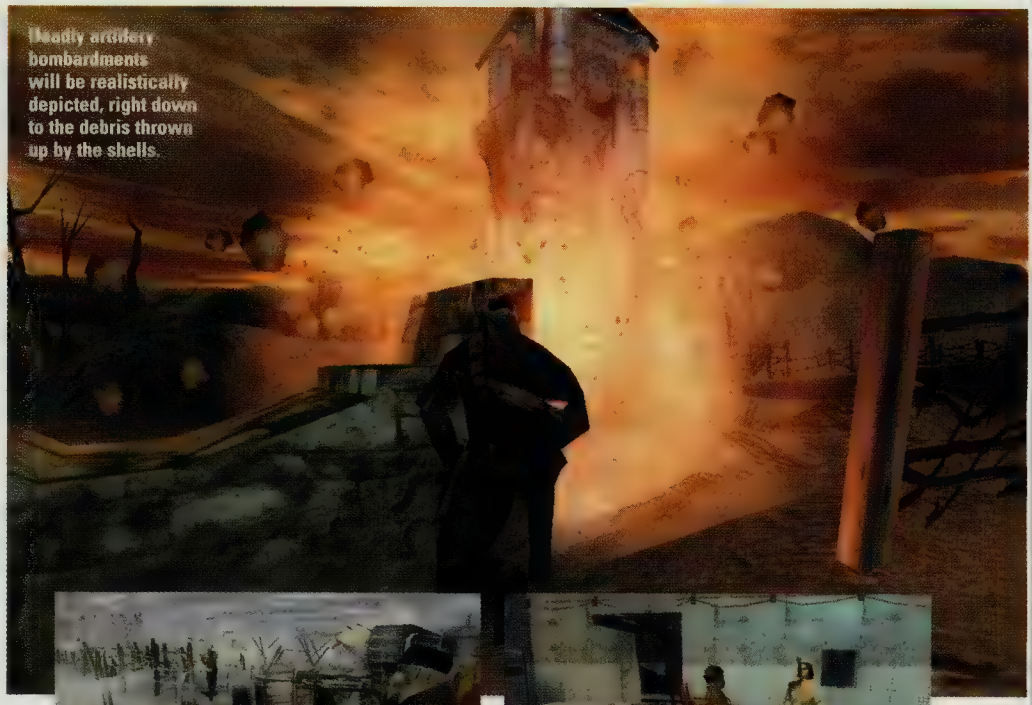
It's 1964 and World War I has never ended. The Central and Allied powers have grown into vast fighting empires: the Eastern Empire, made up of every nation from Russia through Eastern Europe, battles relentlessly against the Western Empire, composed of the nations of Western Europe and the United States. Trench warfare is a way of life, and an inch of No Man's Land is worth more than the lives of hundreds of soldiers. Makes you sick.

4XStudios doesn't want its new game to be brushed off as just another *Quake* or *Rainbow Six* clone, and to that end it's taken a unique approach to *Iron Storm*. French Designer Edouard Lussan explains: "I've never seen a shooter that uses alternate history. [In *Iron Storm*], we start from real history but suddenly invent a new timestream, based on realistic and plausible facts."

In this tangential universe, you're cast as an American from the Western Empire; you're just another doughboy, and your future is bleak. But everything changes when you discover that the entire war has been kept alive by an evil military-industrial consortium. With each passing year, this unnamed corporation has increased both its profits and its influence. To fight them, you join forces with a group of rebels aiming to expose the consortium and end half a century of war.

Thanks to its unique setting, *Iron Storm* looks unlike anything we've seen. Think *Saving Private Ryan* meets the bitter, wintry onslaught of *Stalingrad*, with as much *All Quiet on the Western Front* thrown in, just in case you missed the harshness of *Stalingrad*. Since everything takes place in an alternate reality, all of the weapons and hardware are fictional. But they do reflect a realistic interpretation of what things would look like if the world were stuck in trench warfare for 50 years — in other words, expect close variants of real-life weapons.

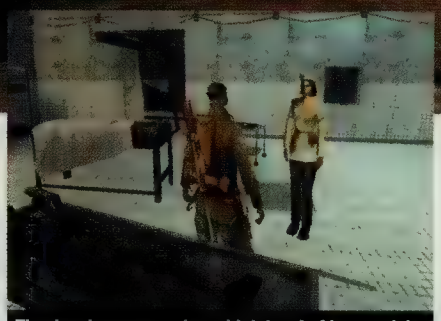
Thanks to its Phoenix graphics engine, 4XStudios is able to produce some pretty spectacular settings. The filth and disarray of the trenches is re-created in exacting detail, with strewn barbed wire, blasted-up tanks, and particle effects that cause dirt to cover your crouched shape as artillery falls. All the weapons are coated with high-res textures that show signs of rust and wear. You'll also have to deal with battlefield ingredients like deadly poison-gas attacks and biplane strafing runs.



Deadly artillery bombardments will be realistically depicted, right down to the debris thrown up by the shells.



4XStudios' Phoenix engine looks like it could stand toe-to-toe with those in current shooters.



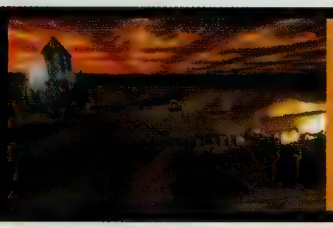
The developers promise a high level of interactivity between you and your allies.

4XStudios plans to offer a mix of stealth and combat missions in a realistic setting — "Realism of war is our main concern," says Lussan. Such authenticity can be tricky considering that all the weapons in the game are imaginary, but the development team is making sure that the action is grounded in realistic physics. "I did deep research on WWI and WWII to conceive the world of *Iron Storm*, so that the designers and developers could rely on precise data to realize the game." You'll be able to play the game from either a first-person or third-person point of view, he adds, and 4X is considering a wide variety of multiplayer settings. One mode will give you the option of playing with more "*Quake*-style" physics.

No U.S. publisher has picked up *Iron Storm* yet, but we're convinced that this situation will be remedied soon.

— Li C. Kuo

F.Y.I.



CATEGORY Action/adventure
DEVELOPER 4XStudios
PUBLISHER TBD
(Get updates at *pcgamer.com*)
PERCENTAGE COMPLETE 40%
RELEASE DATE TBD

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL? Few games in recent memory have used the alternate-history premise with such force, and no game has brought the horror of trench warfare to your PC.

DEVELOPER'S TRACK RECORD Nothing really — these guys haven't done anything that's been released in the U.S. But at the very least, these screens suggest 4X knows how to make a good engine.


A REAL TIME STRATEGY GAME FEATURING THE WEAPONS OF TODAY'S MILITARY
REAL WAR
AIR LAND SEA
SINGLE PLAYER AND ONLINE MULTIPLAYER AND
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SIMON & SCHUSTER INTERACTIVE
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Windows® CD-ROM
COMING FALL 2001

Imperium Galactica III: Genesis

IN A NUTSHELL Keep aliens' mitts off your planets as you colonize the galaxy and build a future empire for all humanity.



Epic, multi-hued space battles are the meat of this tasty sandwich.

The best part of braving the E3 hubbub is the joy of discovering a great-looking "find" in an unlikely place. This time, the game was *Imperium Galactica III: Genesis*, the latest in an epic space-strategy/colonization series.

Graphically, *IGIII* is an amazing piece of work — praise indeed in a genre typified by its bland displays of the planets. What caught my attention first was a jaw-dropping zoom effect that takes you seamlessly from outside the galaxy right up to a single orbiting ship within seconds. That's not to mention the highly detailed ship models and gorgeous weapons and shield effects that guard the intricate texture maps from scarring.

Though the all-new storyline remains shrouded in mystery so as not to ruin any plot surprises, we know that *IGIII* is actually set before the events in the first two games, starting in the year 2060 when humanity has its first encounter with alien neighbors. It sets the action for the next 250 years of human colonization, diplomacy, and, if necessary, combat with other species.

The biggest change from its land- and space-based predecessors is that *IGIII* will be set entirely in space, similar visually to a *Homeworld/Freelancer* hybrid. The action will be all real-time strategy, although your strategy won't always involve combat: Diplomatic relations will play an integral part of advancing through the game's 30 total missions. As you attempt to colonize planets (over 100 total) in hopes of extending humanity's presence in the galaxy, you'll come across six alien species with their eyes (eye?) set on doing the same.

You'll be able to control up to 10 craft simultaneously, and during the span of the story you'll have access to between 20 and 30 unique spaceships. Each ship is customizable, with over 50 types of weapons, shields, engines, and other top-secret devices that you can get either through your own R&D or through trade with aliens.

Spaceships will differ heavily from race to race, and expect four or five unique types of ships for each. Most will be familiar to space-sim fans, like destroyers, cruisers, battleships, carriers, and humongous colony-class craft. In addition, there'll be space stations, bombers, trajects, orbiters, asteroid bases, and many unrevealed surprises that you'll have to discover for yourself.

Of course, you can expect to perform plenty of building and gathering of minerals, energy, technology, and even people as you build your empire. Some missions will focus entirely on completing a particular research project, and the resources you'll need will change depending on what weapon or device is being researched.

Philos Labs boasts that *IGIII* will have high replay value due to the game's numerous secondary missions and the possibility of altering the storyline based on your interspecies interactions and planets colonized. If there's a dark cloud looming on the horizon, it's that *IGIII* will be a single-player game only, but Philos hints that a mission pack with new missions and multiplayer support may come out soon after the game's release.

These screenshots really stirred my interest. And yet, as I told myself during the demo, I come for the graphics, but I stay for the multifaceted strategy.

— Chuck Osborn



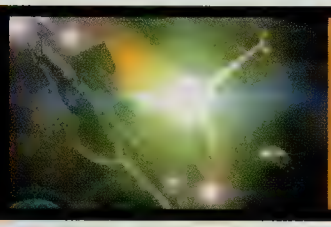
IGIII uses Philos Labs' proprietary Beyond engine for its visual splendor.



Each race's ship design will be unique and intricately detailed.

Didn't watch *Star Trek II*? "Genesis" means an origin, creation, or beginning.

F.Y.I.



CATEGORY: Real-time strategy
DEVELOPER: Philos Labs
PUBLISHER: CDV
www.cdv.de/
PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 25%
RELEASE DATE: Q2 2002

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL: Philos is mixing truly spectacular graphics with some surprisingly complex gameplay. And the many missions and variables will keep you playing long after your first play-through.

DEVELOPER'S TRACK RECORD: Hungarian developer Philos Labs' only release so far is the Aztec- and Mayan-themed *Theocracy*. The studio is also developing *Escape From Alcatraz* to ship this fall.

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0800 Command squad in beachhead assault

1000 Fly Cobra attack helicopter to soften up enemy positions

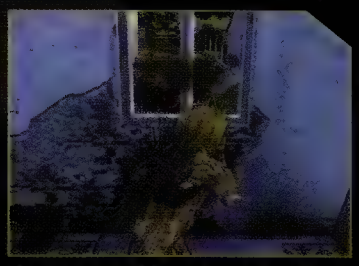
1300 Drive civilian vehicle through checkpoint

1500 Pilot and command a platoon of M1A1 tanks to take enemy stronghold

1800 Go covert with sniper rifle to assassinate enemy commander



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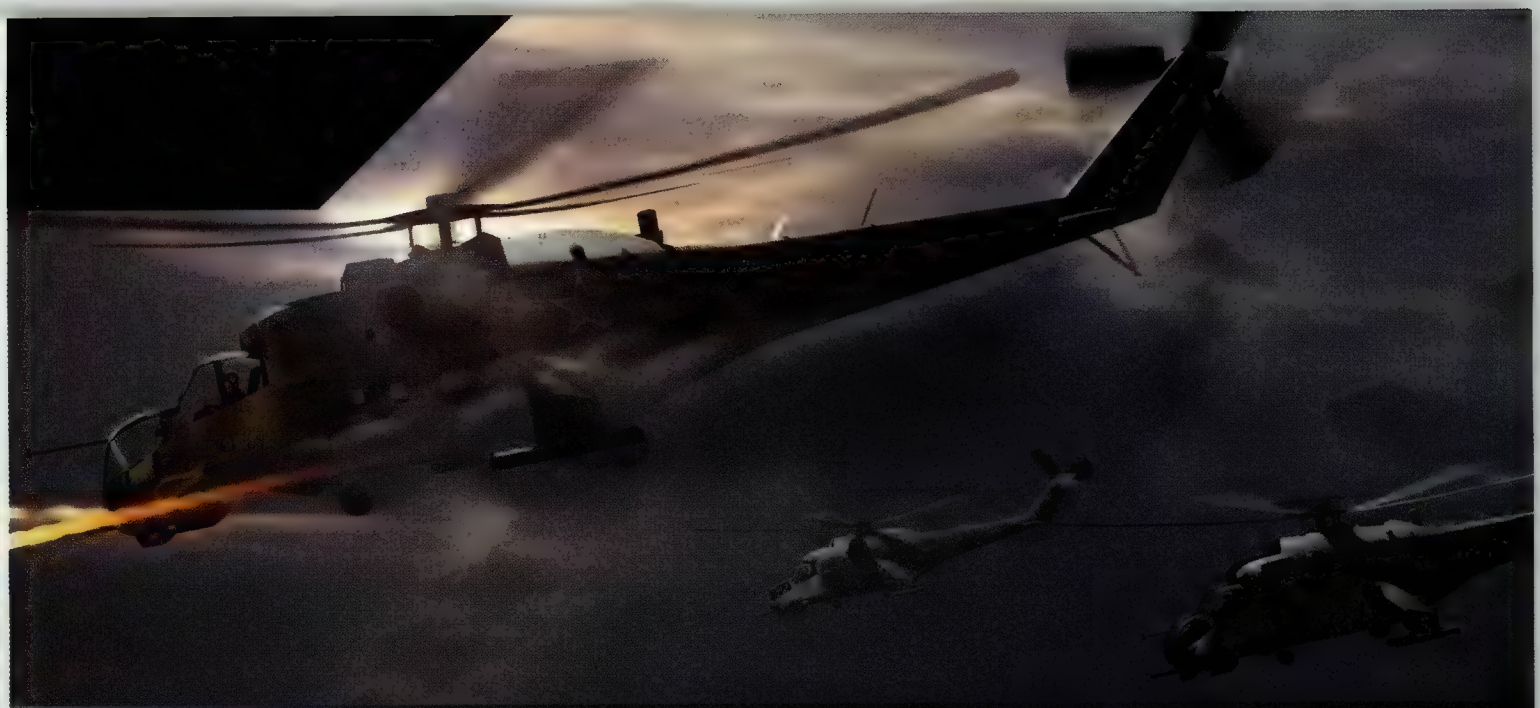


Create and share missions with the built-in Mission Editor and wage war online in multiplayer action via LAN or Internet.

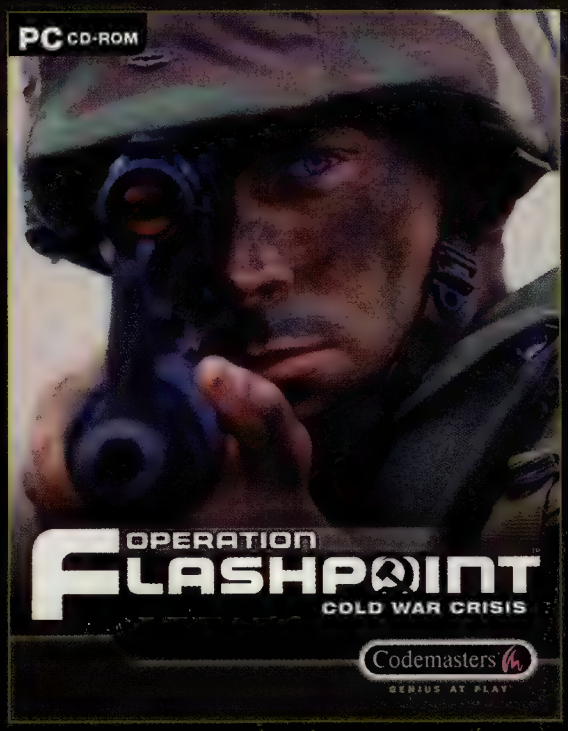












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hands on

As some big-name games finally near release, playable late-beta builds land on our desks. Here's where we give hot-off-the-burner first impressions of how these titles are coming along.



Take direct control of tactical and you can fight battles in either first-person or third-person combat.



That chair is for you. Do you have what it takes to fill it?



During combat, hotkeys pull up menu interfaces used to control ship functions.

Star Trek: Bridge Commander

DEVELOPER Totally Games PUBLISHER Activision CURRENT RELEASE DATE Q4 2001

TOTALLY GAMES is the talented development team behind LucasArts' groundbreaking *X-Wing* series, so you can probably imagine just how excited I was to be at Activision to spend some quality one-on-one time with its upcoming *Star Trek* game *Bridge Commander*.

Just to bring you up to speed, *Bridge Commander* is a tactical action game that lets you direct operations from the most important chair on the bridge — the captain's. That means you're the one barking orders to crewmembers, espousing diplomacy to alien heads on the viewscreen, and occasionally taking direct control over stations when circumstances warrant it. For those who live by their stardates, the game takes place just after the end of the Dominion War, and yes, Picard and Data are both in the game and voiced by Patrick Stewart and Brent Spiner, respectively.



After a quick demonstration of the control scheme by *Bridge Commander*'s senior producer, Parker Davis, I was ready to tackle the pre-alpha build. Call me Captain Chuck (as I'm still trying to convince my coworkers to do).

My first tour of duty began as a Quick Combat match. You can set up one anytime you don't feel like playing through the game's 30-mission storyline, and pit your Federation ship against an assortment of Klingons, Cardassians, Romulans, and Ferengi (Oh my!). I took direct control of the helm and fired away.

Control-wise, first-person-shooter diehards will feel right at home since the default setting for ship-combat movement is the W-A-S-D keyboard configuration. But, don't expect quick-and-dirty *X-Wing*–style action. Two of the Federation ships you control in the game — the *Dauntless* (a Galaxy-class starship) and the *Sovereign* (a prototype that was too trouble-prone to replace the *Enterprise-E* but has now had most of its kinks worked out) — are both too big for nimble space combat. Then again, so are the ships you go up against. Outclassed by two Cardassian Keldon ships, it's not long before I think "He's dead, Jim" as my ship, pummeled by disruptor and torpedo fire, explodes faster than a Tribble in a microwave.

The first three missions act as a built-in tutorial. After your ship's captain is killed during a deep-space mission, you assume command. Luckily, you have Captain Picard along for the ride — or at least on the viewscreen — to give you much-needed instruction.

Sitting at the captain's chair, you have a first-person view of the bridge. Turn to your left or right and you'll see crew manning their stations, and it's either through this interface or hotkeys that you can give orders to individual departments like engineering, tactical, science, helm, and your first officer. Or, if you like, you can take direct command of a station. So, instead of ordering your tactical officer to "fire at will," you'll fire phasers and photon torpedoes manually.

Graphically, *BC*'s ship designs are not only detailed, but properly scaled to their surroundings. Davis revealed that each starship consists of around 3,000 polygons — the highest count of any *Trek* game to date. And when you leave space dock, the experience is sufficiently awe-inspiring: no matter how big your ship may look, it's like an insignificant speck compared to the vastness of a starbase.

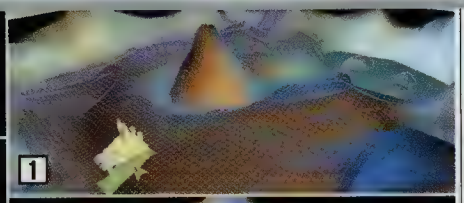
At E3, Activision announced that *BC* would be single-player only, and when I played the game that was still the case. There is hope, though: Activision and Totally Games are currently negotiating over the possibility of incorporating multiplay. Such a development might delay the game's release a couple more months, but I've waited years to take the con, so I guess an extra month or two won't kill me.

— "Captain" Chuck Osborn

Besides size, the *Sovereign*'s special features are enhanced sensors and regenerative shielding.

Ultimate Ride

DEVELOPER Gigawatt
PUBLISHER Disney Interactive
CURRENT RELEASE DATE Sept. 25, 2001





TO ME, THERE ARE two types of people in the world: those who hate rollercoasters and those who can't get enough of 'em. No surprise here, I fall into the latter category. In the early '90s I spent hours upon hours with *Disney's Coaster*, a prototypical rollercoaster-building game that let you not only design and build your own coaster, but ride it in first-person view as well. The simplistic graphics and friction-less physics left much to be desired, but beggars can't be choosers, and in those days coaster fanatics were ecstatic for any crumb that fell our way.

Fast-forward several years. Disney is preparing to release the next technological leap in rollercoaster creation, *Ultimate Ride*. Similar to *Disney's Coaster*, you can build coasters freeform and then ride them in vibrant 3D (powered by Gigawatt's proprietary TERRAWATT engine). Or you can play the game's mission mode, in which you must build a rollercoaster to meet set requirements (such as completing a 40-percent finished coaster using all available theme props). You can build three different types of coasters — wooden, steel, and hanging — and there are six missions per type.

I was fortunate enough to get my hands on a pre-alpha build. Behold my masterpiece, The PC Gamer Gravy Rocket...of Death!

[1] BUILDING BLOCKS

Three environments are available to build in: mountain, asteroid, and cavern. Only the steel coaster was available in this early version, so I decided to make a mountain range the home for my soon-to-be-award-winning steelie. First, set down your docking station. Just like in *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, a green shadow means it's okay to build there.

[2] The interface is more intuitive than *RollerCoaster Tycoon*'s, but it lets you do more than you can in *Sim Theme Park*. Track can be pitched to the left or right, adjusted for length, corkscrewed, looped, or outfitted with a chain for lift-hills. Best of all, once you have your end track reasonably close to the docking station, press the "close circuit" button to complete your rollercoaster. Great idea!

[3] AIR TIME

Once you've finished your coaster, it's time to test it. You'll see that the environments look much different in ride mode than they do in construction mode: textures and lighting effects (which could've distracted you during the building phase) have been added.

[4] Now that you've made sure the ride is perfect, enhance it with a few props. *Ultimate Ride* has three themes: Cyberbia (futuristic sci-fi), Crystal Empire (Jules Verne–inspired settings), and Dragon's Realm (fantasy). Many of the props have built-in animations such as fireworks or wacky movements that are activated when the coaster train passes by.

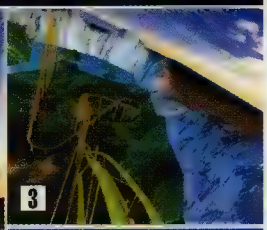
[5] The PC Gamer Gravy Rocket of Death is ready for its debut! When you've finished with construction and props, you can ride your rollercoaster from any of 10 camera angles, including a cinematic third-person mode. Onscreen gauges will tell you your coaster's speed, incline, and G-force. Now save that coaster and trade it with your friends online.

END GAME

Unfortunately, my build of the game has limited landscapes and real-world enhancements like trees and bushes. You also can't deform the environment (as you can in *RCT*). However, Disney has assured me that an expansion pack is already in the works for spring 2002 that will add — if they don't make the game's final release — new themes and props (plus a utility that'll let you make your very own), new missions, and innovative track types such as flying and standing. Additionally, new props will be available for download online. Just be sure to keep your head and arms inside the vehicle at all times and you'll do fine.

— Chuck Osborn







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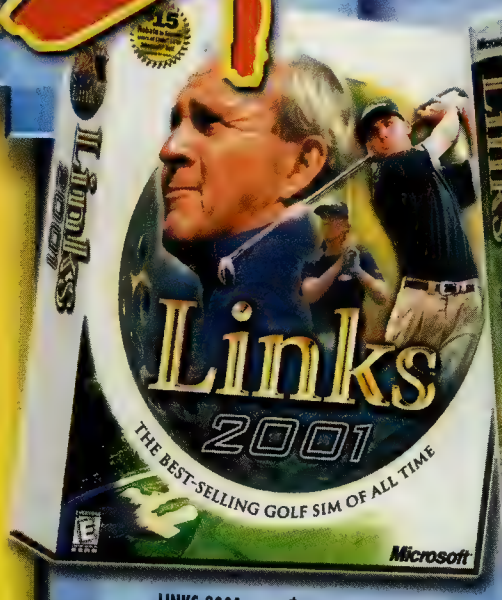
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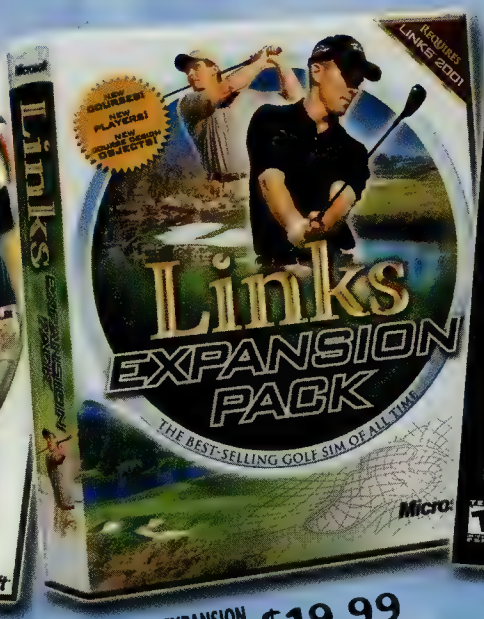
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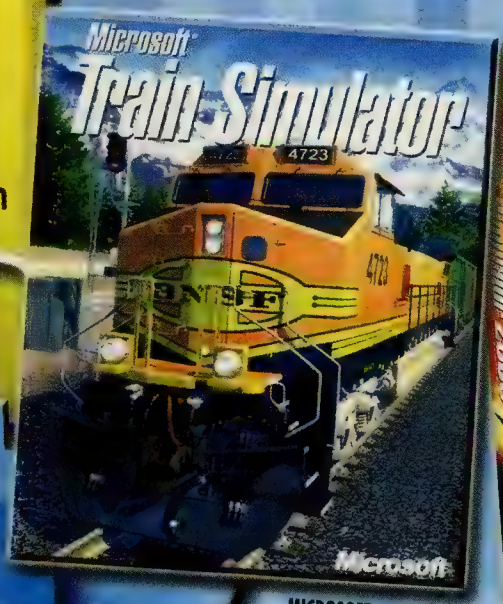
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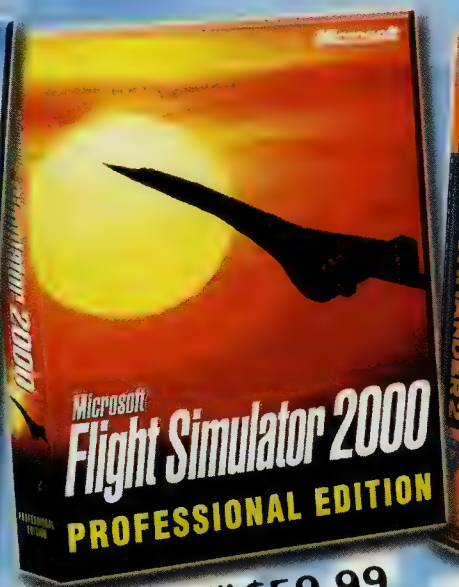
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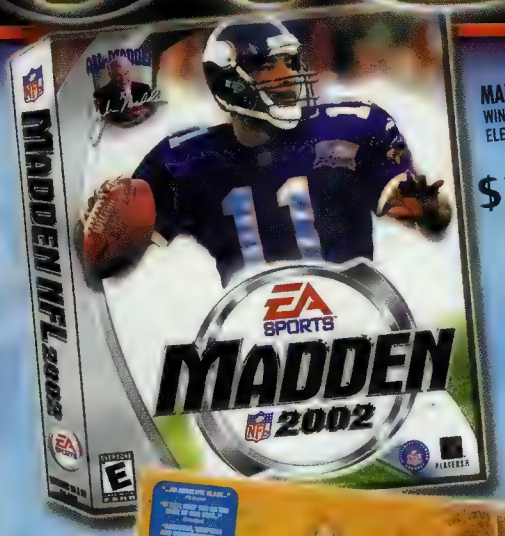
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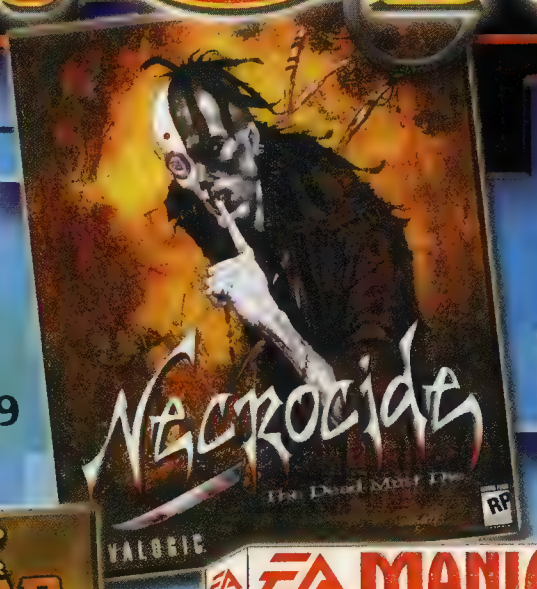
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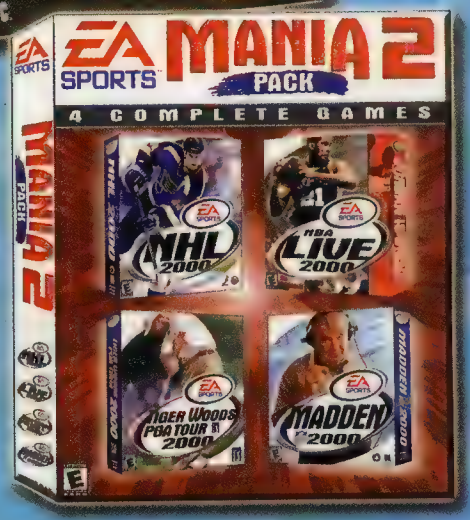
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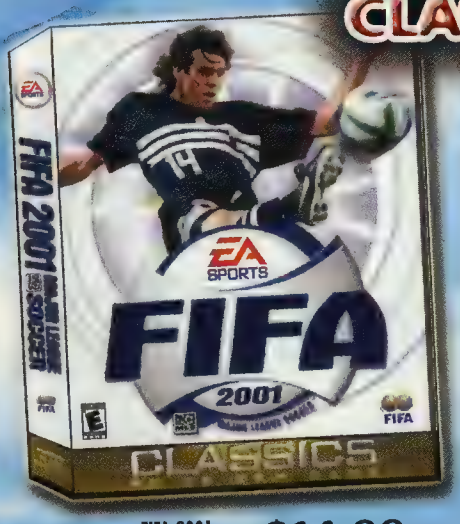


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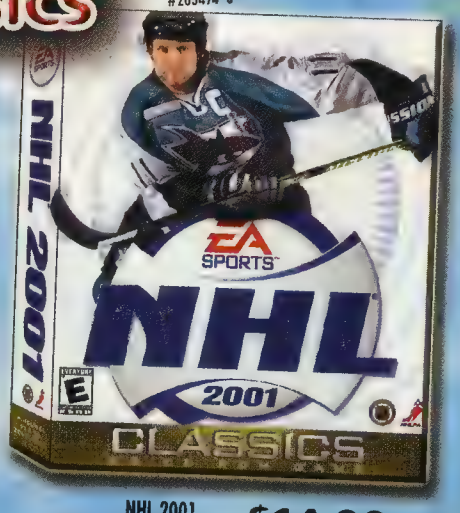


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Some of the weaker creatures are afraid of your flashlight.

Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare

DEVELOPER Darkworks PUBLISHER Infogrames CURRENT RELEASE DATE Summer 2001

THE RECENT ARRIVAL of a playable beta version of the fourth *Alone in the Dark* game sparked a small debate here in the *PCG* offices. Initially, it was decried as a *Resident Evil* clone. However, it was quickly pointed out that *Resident Evil* was a blatant rip-off of the original *Alone in the Dark*. The final conclusion was that *AITD: The New Nightmare* is a copy of a copy of the classic PC original. Good, so that's clear.

Nightmare is pure survival-horror with a distinct console flavor. It's best played with a gamepad, the number of saves is limited, and the overall presentation is *very* similar to that of Capcom's popular *Resident Evil* franchise. From the detailed 3D characters to the shadowy 2D pre-rendered backgrounds they inhabit, adventure horror fans will feel right at home. Graphically, the *Nocturne* engine is being put to the best use yet. The chilling flashlight effect is particularly incredible as it fills the area in front of it with volumetric light.

The gameplay in our late beta feels as console-ish as the rest of the game. Aiming your odd assortment of eight conventional and sci-fi weapons (including a triple-barreled shotgun and a laser gun) is done automatically, ammo is sparse, saving is achieved by using pendants found throughout the game, and the voice acting is bad. Our build also had a significant load time every time you move from one area to another. Also, some of the set camera angles are plagued by the same positional problems that all the *Nocturne*-engine games have exhibited: sometimes the view is picked more for the visual effect than practicality, and as a result, you'll run into problems seeing everything. On the other hand, the environmental sound effects are genuinely creepy, as are the zombies that creep out of dark corners and corridors.

We're long overdue for a new adventure/thriller title for the PC; let's hope this game's final version is polished to perfection.

— Li C. Kuo

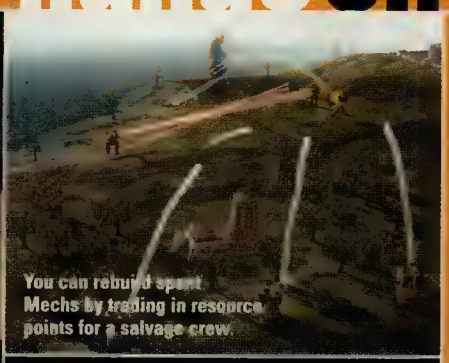


Edward Carnby gets a new, updated look — complete with long hair and a trenchcoat.



"Wanna touch my triple-barreled shotgun?"

Chiaki's alone-in-the-dark story involves five minutes in a closet.



You can rebuild spent Mechs by trading in resource points for a salvage crew.

MechCommander 2

DEVELOPER Microsoft
PUBLISHER Microsoft
CURRENT RELEASE DATE July 2001

MECHCOMMANDER 2, like its big brother *MechWarrior 4*, has god-awful actors in the FMV segments. Thankfully, that's about the biggest complaint I think you'll be hearing about this FASA-licensed action-focused RTS.

The late beta we played was well on its way to being stamped "Release Candidate." The tutorial, which takes place on a *Tron*-like wireframe battlefield, holds your hand through all the basics. Mechs can either walk or run to their destination, and those equipped with jump jets can leap to cliff tops. True to the FASA universe, some Mechs are built to attack from long distances, while others are close-range scrappers.



Mechs can walk through shallow water only; deeper pools are impassible.

In the first few missions of the campaign, you're dealt only three or four Mechs to command, and you can't create units. Clearly this setup differs from that in Westwood-style real-time strategy games, but it does create a sense that each unit is monumentally valuable and resources are short.

In attacking enemy fortresses, you can use different strategies, such as taking out their guard turrets with brute force, or finding a way around these turrets and capturing the control building. Doing the latter will command the turrets to fire on the enemy, which seems like a subtle nod to the multiple solution options of *Deus Ex*.

The resource units are interesting, too. You can capture them from enemy compounds and then cash in for items like a repair truck, an air strike, or long-range radar scans. Generally, the battles feel suitably powerful as Mech behemoths pound on each other, and the explosions are graphically splendid. We heartily look forward to the final.

— Jeremy Williams

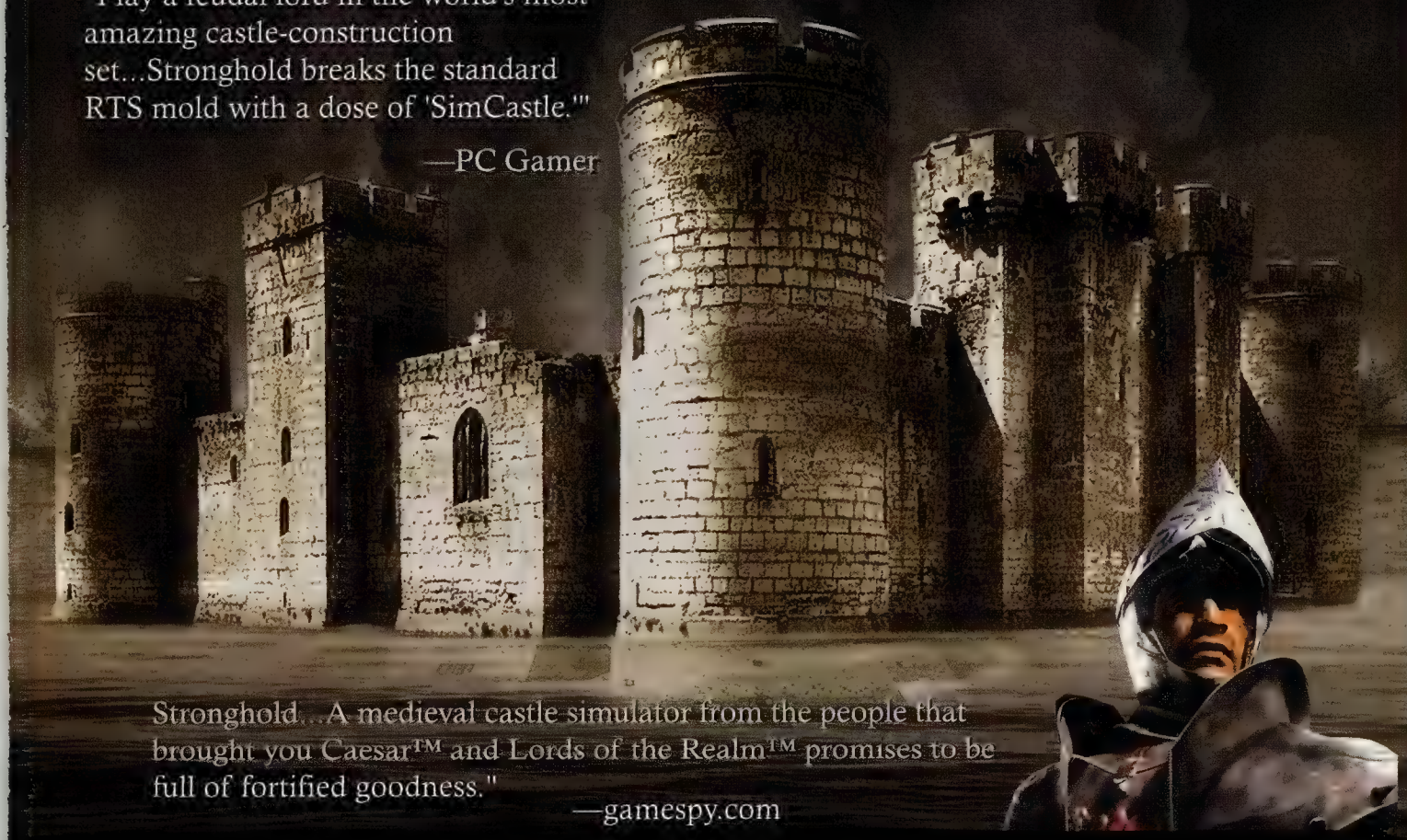
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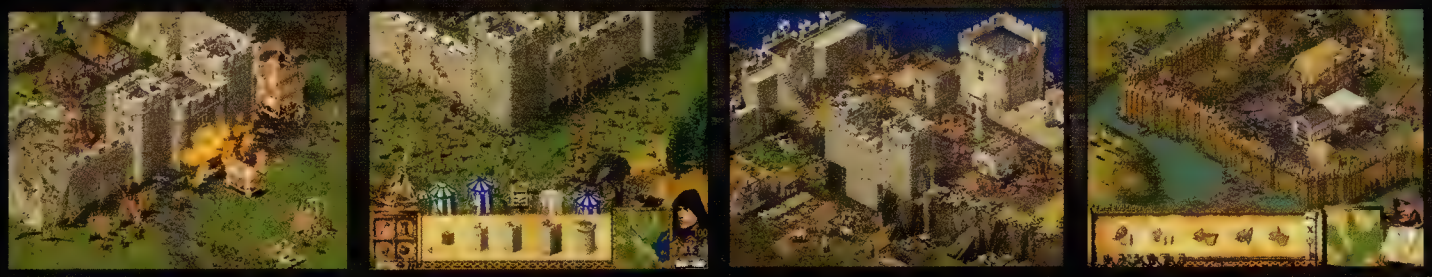
—PC Gamer



Stronghold...A medieval castle simulator from the people that brought you Caesar™ and Lords of the Realm™ promises to be full of fortified goodness."

—gamespy.com

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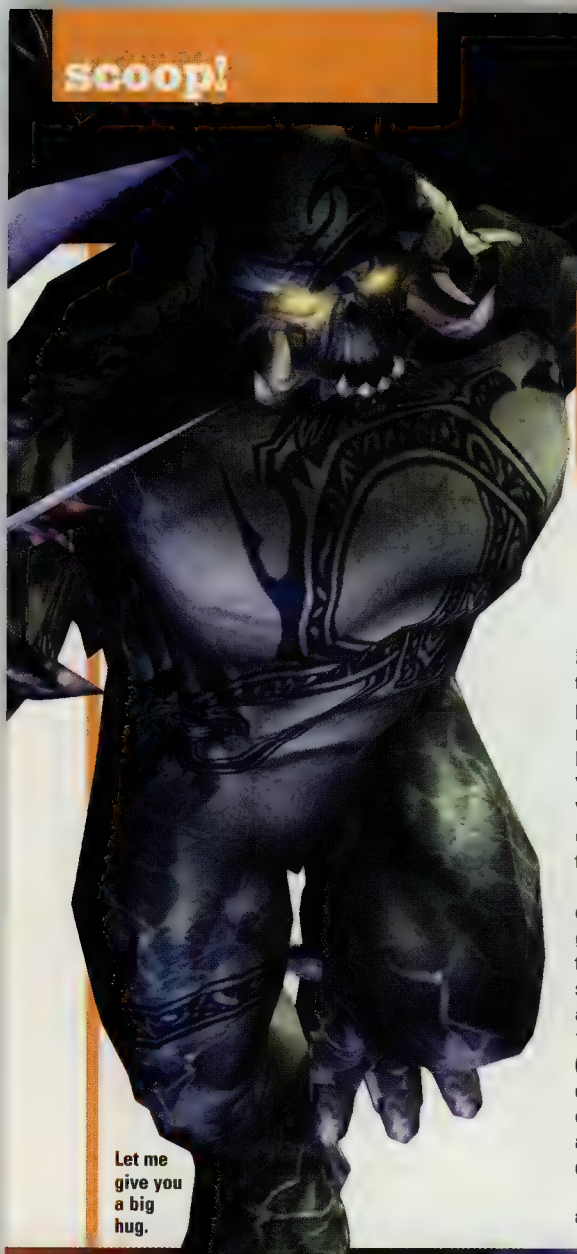
TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

VIOLENCE
BLOOD



Unreal II

Lead designer Mike Verdu (Legend Entertainment) discusses designing a sequel and reintroducing the Skaarj, with help from Epic's Cliff Bleszinski.



Let me give you a big hug.

PC Gamer: When you sit down to design the sequel to a huge-selling, huge-name game, what design pressures are you under to remain true to the original against creating a fresh experience?
Mike Verdu: There's obviously intense pressure. You have to be true to the game's fictional universe. You also have to do your best to define the true essence of the original game — and figure out how to capture and extend the experience in the sequel.

Defining the essence of a game can be quite difficult. For *Unreal II*, we knew we had to deliver a game that (1) took advantage of next-generation technology to deliver an immersive experience in stunningly beautiful environments, (2) reflected the advances made in single-player FPS games since 1998 and included significant innovation of our own, (3) featured cool new weapons and a new bestiary of strange and wonderful enemies and ambient creatures, and (4) incorporated kick-ass combat and new AI to make the moment-to-moment experience intense and fun.

We're also introducing interaction with friendly and neutral NPCs (including the crew in your ship) and a mission-based framework that provides a variety of game situations, from hostage rescue to squad-based combat to the more traditional exploration of new environments.



A moment in time: the merc's mind races in slow motion: his childhood, his family...his innards.

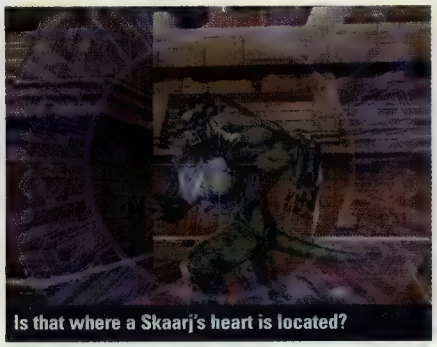
PCG: How many drafts does the game-design doc go through over the course of development? How many have you done so far?
MV: We started with a paper game design that was approved by Epic and then put on an internal project web site. We believe that the design is a living document — as concept sketches, mission descriptions, weapon specs, and other low-level design elements are fleshed out, they're added. Revisions are made as necessary.

This is the first time we've used a project web site to document the design and capture status information about the development effort — but after using it for a while I can't imagine how we did it before.

PCG: What's the major direction or focus shift you've done or been forced to do in the design thus far?
MV: The design has evolved tremendously in order to take advantage of the incredible technology that is now available. A specific example is the effect that the new terrain system has on the mission designs. When we realized how powerful this new technology would be, we changed the game design so that more of the game is set on planetary surfaces rather than inside the bases and ships. We also came up with new types of gameplay, including attack/defense missions in which players assaulted or defended bases set into terrain.

There are new opportunities and constraints for the individual level designers as well. For example, the LDs need to be careful to add terrain features and structures around bases and combat arenas to stop combat in a terrain level from degenerating into a long-range sniper-fest.

PCG: In taking the story in a new direction with a new character, location, and setup, how are the Skaarj going to be incorporated?
MV: The player takes the role of a peace officer on the high frontier — he patrols a sector of space that is in the early stages of colonization. An interstellar war breaks out in this normally quiet area...and the Skaarj are embroiled in this conflict.



Is that where a Skaarj's heart is located?



Various Skaarj tribes sport different cool tattoos.

The player must find out why the war started, attempt to stop the fighting, and protect the civilians who are caught in the crossfire. These sometimes-conflicting objectives will lead the player into many furious battles against multiple alien races — including the Skaarj. One twist is that the player will sometimes forge temporary alliances with one race or faction to win a battle — and in a few cases the player will actually find himself fighting alongside the Skaarj against another opposing faction.

PCG: Will the Skaarj be the primary enemy in *Unreal II*? Will there be "boss" Skaarj?
MV: The Skaarj won't be the primary enemies in *UII* — but the player will encounter them relatively often.

We've developed the Skaarj race a bit since the original *Unreal*. They've become significantly more buffed — they are physically even more intimidating than they were in the first game. They now have tribal affiliations so that there are different Skaarj sub-factions. Each Skaarj has body tattoos corresponding to its specific tribe. There are also three classes of Skaarj in *Unreal II* — and the Heavy Skaarj is an armored monster that could well be described as a "Boss Skaarj."

PCG: What's the plural of Skaarj, anyway?
CliffyB: Skaarj.

PCG: What about baby Skaarj? Are they reptiles, mammals, or something else?
CB: Reptiles. The Skaarj have babies that grow into adults.

PCG: How important is it to have gameplay up and running early in development so that you can start to gauge how fun and compelling the design is going to be?
MV: I think it's very important to get gameplay up and running quickly — but it's difficult to do when the gameplay will be affected by key elements of the technology that aren't ready until halfway through development. The new terrain system, hardware brushes, skeletal animation system, and our enhanced AI came together rather recently. We had to do a lot of work during 2000 based on assumptions about how the pieces that we didn't have yet would work together. We were on pins and needles as we waited to see if the whole would be greater than the sum of the parts. We weren't disappointed.

We started seeing the "soul" of the game emerge for the first time in the months leading up to E3. Now we've gotten to the point where I'm amazed by what I see every time I do a level review with the team.

PCG: Is creating a game in the same universe as *Unreal* really like making a completely original action game since the ties to the original are so vague?
MV: I always felt the influence of the original *Unreal* — and even of *Unreal Tournament*. For example, I thought the Assault game in *UT* was amazing, and have worked very hard to incorporate that dynamic in a single-player context with a strong story element. I've always been keenly aware that this game carries the *Unreal* name.

HOW A MISSION PLAYS

The mission starts with a briefing on your ship, the *Atlantis*. Your sidekick, Aida, will go through the background that led to the current situation and describe the setting, possible enemies, and the mission objectives. Once the briefing is finished, you can go to the armory and get equipped — Isaak will discuss any new weapons that are available. Oriented and armed, you proceed to the dropship and head for the planet surface.

You have Mercenary soldiers under your command. A certain amount of time is allocated to setup: you can scout the location you're defending, give specific orders to troops, and attempt to gather intelligence about the attackers. A count-down clock will be running during this initial period.

When the clock runs out, Marine dropships arrive and the first wave descends on the base. You must work with your soldiers to fight off the attackers. Once you beat the first wave, you have a brief time to re-arm, heal, and reposition before new bad guys show up. A third wave follows the second.

Assuming you successfully defend the base, the *Atlantis*' dropship returns. Aida does a quick debriefing and then you're free to roam the ship and talk to the crew.

Not every mission will follow this formula — some missions start directly where others leave off. And each mission is different: the gameplay will have considerable variety. Some missions will require strategy, while others will be visceral, fast-paced search-and-destroy sorties where you'll mow down swarms of creatures.



Fire. Fire. Fire. Fire. Fire.



Infinite Space, Advanced Weaponry, Impossible Odds



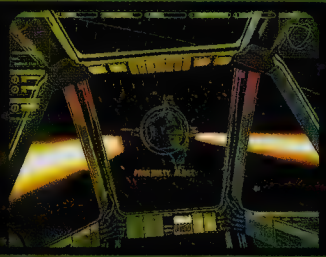
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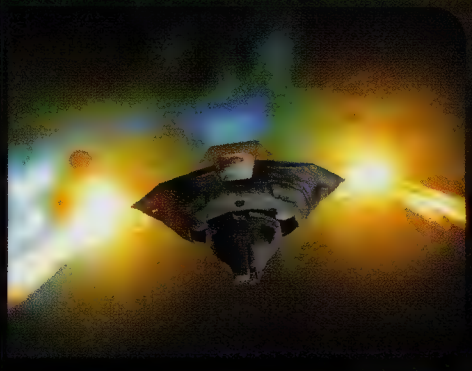
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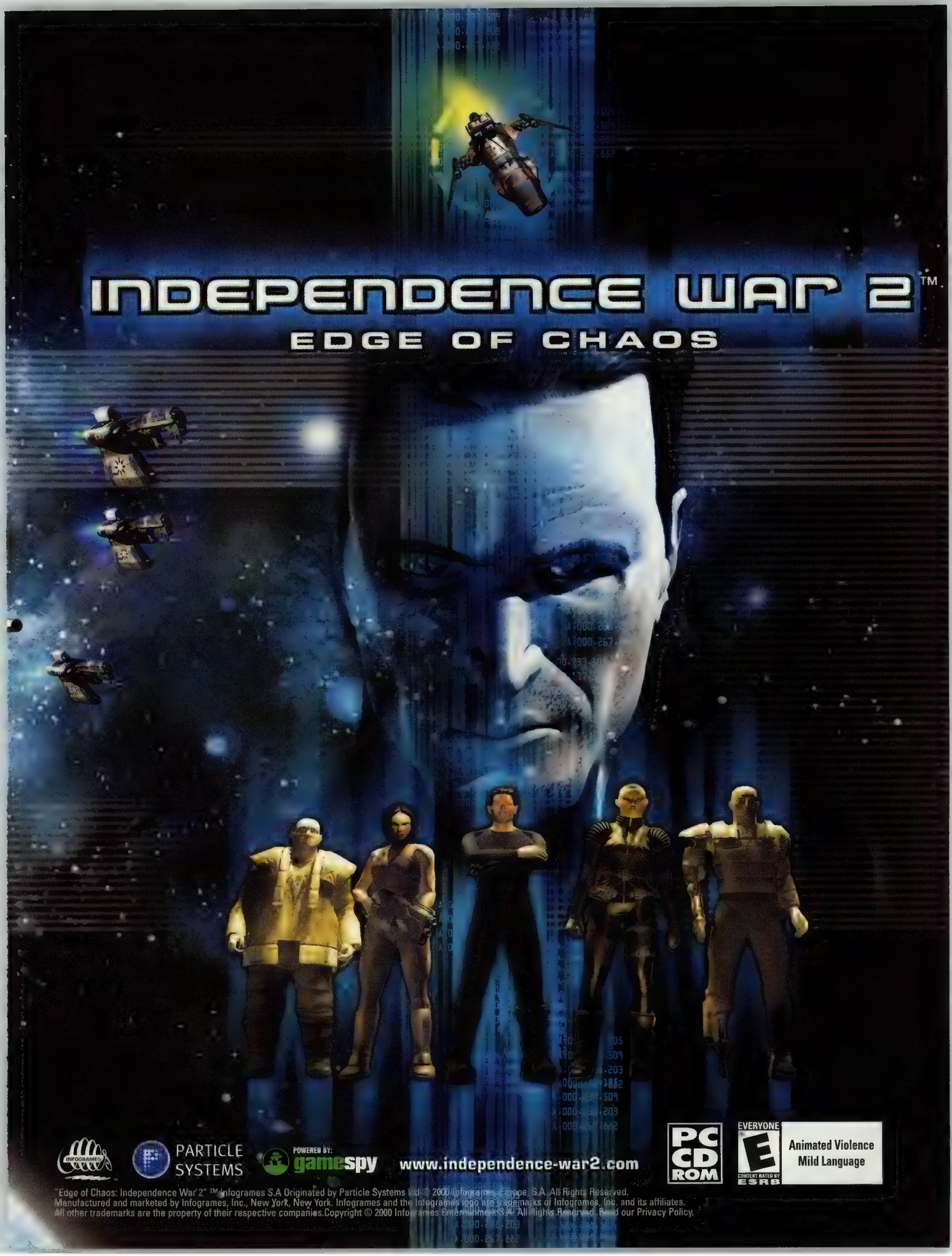
//> Explore the vast depths of the universe spanning 16 star systems











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VOL. 8 • NO. 9 • SEPT. 2001



Thanks to motion-capture, the animations in games like *Soldier of Fortune 2* look incredible. Inset: Some of the gear used to make motion-capture possible.

SPACE

ALL THE RIGHT MOVES

Motion-capturing in PC games is quite an art form. Who does it? How much does it cost? What are the benefits? We find out.

Remember the old days when animation was little more than a few stiff frames of a 2D stickman running left or right? Well, in today's games, animation has become one of the keys to a great graphical feel and style. Right now, House of Moves (HOM) is arguably the biggest and most renowned motion-capture studio in the world, so we talked to Jarrod Phillips, the company's vice president, about how it all works.

PCG: How did House of Moves get started?
Jarrod Phillips: House of Moves originally began when co-founders Tom Tolles and Brett Gassaway left Viewpoint (a 3D modeling company) to start a motion-capture service bureau. When they founded HOM, only a handful of videogames had even considered using mo-cap for animation. HOM is now in its sixth year of operation and has performed the motion capturing for over 200 videogames (including *Rogue Spear* and *Soldier of Fortune*), as well as the mo-cap for feature films such as *Titanic*, *The Patriot*, *Blade*, and more. Our motion-capturing for games has encompassed 600 shoot days and about 200,000 shots captured (and of those, close to 50,000 shots shipped).

Our first project was Activision's *HyperBlade*, for which we captured hundreds of very aggressive rollerblading motions on a half-pipe in the UK with only seven cameras. (We now use the Vicon8 optical system, which uses up to 24 cameras.)

PCG: Can you name any PC games that you're currently working on?
JP: *Soldier of Fortune 2* and the sequel to *Asheron's Call*, for starters...

PCG: What are some of the stranger motion-captures you've had to make?
JP: We've captured dogs, naked performance artists, figure skating, skateboarding, and everything in-between. I guess it depends on one's definition of "strange." (My vote goes to the naked performance artist.)

PCG: What's the most common motion-capture requested by people?
JP: Probably any sports-related motion (football, baseball, ice hockey, and so on), although these days we're doing more and more *Matrix*-style wire work and martial-arts stuff.

PCG: How much does it cost to hire House of Moves?
JP: Our pricing involves a couple of components. Shooting in our studio usually runs about $7,000 per day plus talent fees for a 10-hour-shoot day. Processing (or data clean-up) is all over the map and depends on a bunch of different factors, such as how long the shots are, what kind of motion is being captured, what 3D-animation package the animators are using, etc. An average day of shooting plus processing roughly 100 to 150 motions can run between $20,000 to $30,000 or so.

PCG: Some people say that motion-capture is used to compensate for less talented animators. What's your response to that?
JP: I completely disagree. Even if animators are extremely talented, it's just not practical to assume that they could create hundreds or thousands of realistic animations in the same time (or for the same amount of money) it would take to mo-cap those animations. If you want CG characters to move like real people, motion-capture is simply the fastest and easiest way to do that.

>>> THE PCG NEWS TICKER >>>

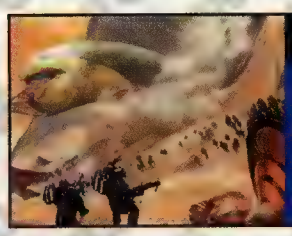
Microsoft has announced the Age of Empires II: The Conquerors International Tournament. Players will compete for a $50,000 prize. Expect more details soon.



<<< Looks like the *Unreal*-powered first-person shooter *X-COM: Alliance* may never see store shelves. Its publisher, Infogrames, is uncertain about its future.

This fall, Microsoft will ship *MechWarrior 4: Dark Knight*. This *Mech 4* add-on will include a new single-player campaign, new Mechs, and new multiplayer options.

Clive Barker's Undying has been taken off store shelves in Hong Kong after it was found that the game contained scenes and Arabic phrases that offended Muslims.



PCG CONTEST

EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE

Westwood's finally made the move to 3D with its latest hit RTS, *Emperor: Battle for Dune*. So what do we do when a game like this comes out? Give it away, of course. Just send an email to *eyewitness@pcgamer.com* with "Dune Contest" in the subject heading. Be sure to include your address so we know where to send the prize if you win. We'll randomly pick five lucky winners to get a free copy of *Emperor*. Contest ends Sept. 30, 2001. See additional rules on page 44.

SEEN

THE AGE OF CLANS

Organizing yourself for online play with buddies is easier than you might think

If you play shooters online, chances are you've been sniped, knifed, or ambushed by someone with a bracketed acronym in front of his name. These signs of group affiliation are just about everywhere nowadays. Organized online gaming teams — clans — are bigger than ever.

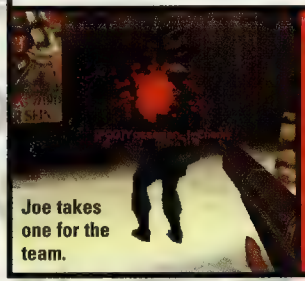
We asked members of a few clans what brought members to their group. Their answers all included one critical reason: fun. Stephen Iwanyk, a member of *Day of Defeat* clan the 101st (based on the famous 101st Airborne Division), cites three main reasons for joining a clan: "The camaraderie that goes with clans is fantastic; clan matches are much better than public games in terms of intensity and gameplay; and sometimes people want an organized, team-based environment."

How does someone join a clan? Philip (XDariuS) Stephanets from *Quake III* clan [VrX] says his group gets new members by holding tryouts. These trials usually entail a match with the clan's best players while current members watch as spectators. "We'll rate them on their teamwork as well as their smarts," explains Stephanets. Jon Paul Nollmann, from the *TFC* clan [PTW], or Play to Win, tells us, "Some clans have designated recruiters that keep an eye out for good players and approach them online." All the clan members told us that if you're good enough, someone will be interested in you.

Gaming-related companies have even offered some clans sponsorship. One example is the QGirlZ clan. This all-female *Quake* and *Counter-Strike* clan quickly made a name in gaming tournaments and was approached by hardware maker NVIDIA. Alison Suttles, known online as Trillian, says: "NVIDIA supplied video cards for the whole team, as well as a wonderful collection of T-shirts and swag. Some of it was for the team itself and other items we've given out at different events we've attended."

Everyday gamers aren't the only people forming clans: industry groups are getting in on the action, too. Eidos Interactive has a team known as the Hazard clan [HzD]. Based on *Dukes of Hazzard*, they play under names like Boss_Hog and DaisyDuke. The team is made up of programmers, PR people, QA testers, and other company employees.

Gregg Pollack, president of Gaming Leagues (*www.gleagues.com*), a company that runs online tournaments, tells us, "There are at least 10,000 active clans in the U.S." Considering these clans can have anywhere from five to 60 members, that's a vast number of gamers. Is this a fad? We doubt it. Suttles puts it best when she says: "Whether you call it a clan or a team, it's an organized group of gamers with a common goal. Sometimes that goal is competition and sometimes it's fun. But [clans] bring us together as gamers and friends, and there's no way they're going to disappear."



Joe takes one for the team.

PCG TAKES ON A CLAN

Clan PCG decided to test its mettle against the seasoned 101st *DoD* clan. Unfortunately, due to incompatible schedules, only Li, Joe, Corey, and Chiaki were available for the brutal skirmish.

With a few troops on loan from the 101st, we fought some thrilling seven-on-seven battles in the Caen and Snowtown maps. In the end, the *PCG* team was bloody and beaten, and [101st] Frosty had topped the list in kills. Next time, guys...

PC GAMER RECOMMENDS

WATERLOO: NAPOLEON'S LAST BATTLE — 90%



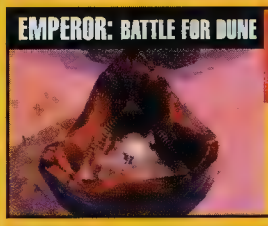
Hardcore strategy with a French flavor. Yum.

ECHELON — 91%



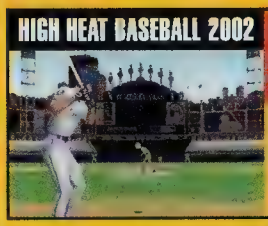
Sci-fi action + realistic physics = a real winner.

EMPEROR: BATTLE FOR DUNE — 89%



Conquer Arrakis in Westwood's first 3D RTS.

HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2002 — 85%



Rob Smith loves this game, and so should you.

GRAND PRIX 3 — 84%



Tired of ovals? Try out this sweet F1 racer.

LAN-PARTY REPORT



WHAT: The Million Man LAN 2001
WHERE: Portland, Oregon
WHEN: August 24–26, 2001

With room for up to 300 gamers, the MML is at the top end of LAN-party attendance. Everything from *Quake III* to *Counter-Strike* and *Serious Sam* will be played. Entry is $20. Visit *www.mml2.com* for more information. Thanks to Ty for giving us the heads-up on this one. Remember, send LAN-party news to *Li@pcgamer.com*.

Peter Tamte, ex–vice president of Bungie, has started a new game company named Destineer. So far there's no word on what its first game will be.

Westwood has just released a mission and map editor for *Red Alert 2* dubbed FinalAlert 2. Download it from *www.westwood.ea.com* and make us some cool maps!

An official co-op mod for *Rune* is available for download at *www.runegame.com*. Now up to four players can go through the single-player game together.

Driver is coming to your Palm Pilot. Infogrames recently penned a deal with Springtoys to port six of its games to the popular PDA, including *Deer Hunter* and *Beachhead 2000*.

Sony Online Entertainment will use a translation system in its massively multiplayer games, such as *Star Wars Galaxies*, so you can talk with other gamers in any language.

NEWS

REAL WAR BORN AGAIN HARD



PCG chats with *Full Metal Jacket*'s R. Lee Ermey about his role in this upcoming RTS

When you think of boot camp, you think of R. Lee Ermey. His performance as the profanity-spewing, ego-crushing drill instructor Gunnery Sergeant Hartman in Stanley Kubrick's film *Full Metal Jacket* has become our most indelible shared image of sadistic military indoctrination.

So when Simon & Schuster Interactive set out to find a voice to provide the tutorial and in-mission instruction for gamers booting up its RTS *Real War*, it ended up with the only man who can truly do the job full justice.

PC Gamer: What do you think of *Real War* having descended from actual military-training software?
R. Lee Ermey: I can't believe how far these games have come. My kids have always had videogame systems. *Mario* and *Donkey Kong*, those are the ones I played. But with this game, I can't even tell if it's not video footage. The only way I can tell a battleship isn't video footage is if it's side-by-side with actual footage.

PCG: Being a military man, do you think there's value in these kinds of training tools?
Ermey: Oh, there always has been, at least as long as I've been in the military. That's what initially got my attention about this project: They were using the game [*Real War*'s based on] to train NATO commanders. You almost have to make instruction entertaining. I was a Marine Corps instructor, and I was a bit of a stand-up comedian when I did it. You have to entertain if you expect people to remember anything.

PCG: Can we expect your signature in-your-face style of instruction?
Ermey: Yes. I got the script and made changes to it, in order to make it my own. And I was allowed to do that. So I'll be able to do what I do. Say whatever else you want about Gunnery Sergeant Hartman — at least he was colorful.

PCG: Tell us about the new Ermey talking action figure.
Ermey: A 12-inch R. Lee Ermey "motivational figure" will be coming out soon. It looks just like me: I approved the toy at every stage. You press a button on it and it'll give you an earful. It'll work as an alarm clock, too, so if you press the snooze button, he might say to you: "Did you just press my snooze button, asshole? Drop and give me 25!" Then you get your wakeup call and your morning exercise, too. You can pre-order them from *www.rleeermey.com*, and the ones ordered on my site will be signed by me.

PCG: Any other thoughts on games and gaming?
Ermey: Yes. I want to be sure and say this: Videogames don't cause violence. I weaned my kids on these games. If a kid's sick, then a kid's sick — he's defective. Get him some help. But games aren't going to make anybody run out and shoot someone.

DESIGN LAB



THE ROCK

■ By Chris Gomes, Wyckoff, New Jersey

THIS ONLINE THIRD-PERSON career mode–type game takes place in the future on the newly reopened Alcatraz Island. You are a criminal in jail, and you have only one goal: escape. Every other prisoner is an actual person online who you can team up with to help you escape. The prison has individual cells, a cafeteria, and recreational areas, creating a huge online experience.

Humans would control all the guards that patrol the prison's many halls. Contests would be held online, and the winner would get a job (with real money) playing one of the guards online. Bonuses would be given if you stop an escape; that way, every guard would try their hardest to prevent escapes.

This game could play out as many different genres. You could take the shooter course and, after stealing a gun, shoot every guard you meet. Or you could take the stealth path, à la the movie *Escape From Alcatraz*, where you must steal tools and make dummy heads to cover your escape, among other options. But, when you die or get caught, you must create a new criminal and start a whole new escape from a different cell with different cellmates.



Send your Lab ideas to design@pcgamer.com.

THE PCG RELEASE METER

Rich LaPorte gets it done again with another hot release list. Thanks, buddy! Please send all release-date news to *laporte@gonegold.com*. Go to *www.gonegold.com* for the latest release dates.

	Title	Publisher	Date	Prognosis
AUGUST	Skate Park Tycoon	Activision	08/02/01	Skates in
	Sudden Strike Forever	Strategy First	08/03/01	Shooting for it
	Duke Nukem: Endangered Species	G.O.D.	08/17/01	Checking...
	Rune Gold	G.O.D.	08/21/01	Easy mark
	Real War	Simon & Schuster	08/21/01	Targeted
	Independence War	Infogrames	08/21/01	Slipped to here
	Arcanum	Sierra	08/22/01	Done deal
	Conquest: Frontier Wars	Ubi Soft	08/22/01	Strong
	Destroyer Command	GAME Studios	08/23/01	Probable
	Silent Hunter II	GAME Studios	08/23/01	Likely
	Desperados	Infogrames	08/24/01	Who knows
	Art of Magic	Bethesda	08/31/01	Unlikely
	Trade Empires	Eidos	09/05/01	Strong
SEPTEMBER	Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor	GAME Studios	09/07/01	Possible
	Monopoly City	Hasbro	09/07/01	Maybe
	Throne of Darkness	Sierra	09/12/01	Possible
	Rails Across America	Strategy First	09/12/01	On track
	Dragon's Lair 3D	Ubi Soft	09/13/01	Likely
	Motor City Online	EA	09/19/01	Green light
	Empire Earth	Sierra	09/19/01	Next month
	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	09/20/01	Should be
	Red Faction	THQ	09/20/01	Yes
	Conflict Zone	Red Storm	09/21/01	Most likely
	Dungeon Siege	Microsoft	09/27/01	Can't wait
	Lock On: Air Contact	Ubi Soft	09/27/01	Probable
	Evil Twin	Ubi Soft	09/28/01	We'll see
	IL-2: Sturmovik	Ubi Soft	09/28/01	We hope so

CONTEST RULES No purchase is necessary. Only one entry per household, per month, will be counted. Anyone can vote, but only United States residents are eligible to win prizes, and the offer is void in FL, RI, Puerto Rico, and where prohibited by law. Your chances of winning depend on the number of entries we receive. Failure to follow the rules will result in instant disqualification.

THE PCG NEWS TICKER

Rowdy Roddy Piper has signed on with Kellogg Creek Software to help on the development of an online multiplayer wrestling strategy game called *Roddy's Ring*.

Gathering of Developers has created the "Substance Award" in memory of Douglas Myres Jr. It'll be awarded to people who make a positive impact in the gaming community.

The prices for CD-Rs and CD-RWs are going up an average of 30 percent due to increased production costs and fewer companies producing the popular media.

You can now pre-order the action game *Max Payne* direct from 3D Realms at *www.buymaxpayne.com* for $49.99. The first 50,000 pre-orders get a free mousepad.

Paramount's *Tomb Raider* movie raked in $50 million in its opening weekend. Now let's see how other game-based movies such as *Final Fantasy* and *Resident Evil* do.

PC GAMER PLAYLIST

Summertime slump? What's that? Here at the *PCG* office we've had plenty to keep our gaming appetites sated. Moreover, we're trying to make sure that we've got the current crop of games finished, as it's rumored that we'll have *Max Payne* ready to play for next issue. Next month this column may have a very familiar look, with everyone listing *Max*!



ROB >>> My Sheffield United finally won the English Premiership in *Championship Manager* — oh happy day. I'm also continuing to terrorize Nazis in *Day of Defeat*, and even had the patience to try *World War II Online* — it'll be great in a year or so. A late-beta version of the second *Pool of Radiance* is also showing promise.



COREY >>> After all the attention we've given it in recent months, I finally loaded up *The Longest Journey*. What an awesome adventure — I haven't had this much fun point-and-clicking my way through a futurescape since Kalisto's underrated *Dark Earth*. I've been playing some *Starfleet Command II* and *Day of Defeat*, too.



DAN >>> In anticipation of this month's *Sims Online* exclusive, I returned once more to my well-worn copy of *The Sims*. I must say it's even more fun with the Simpranos skins that I downloaded for maximum Mafia goodness. Other than that, I'm proud to say that my *Day of Defeat* sniping skills are still unparalleled.



CHUCK >>> Wonder why I look so stern here? You see, there's well-researched science behind the Playlist. It's why we have one big smile (Corey), several bemused smirks (Dan, Li, Jeremy, Joe, and Chiaki), one blank slate (Rob), the serious stare (me), and "the crazy guy" (Greg). Without such complex balance...



LI >>> Between hourslong sessions of *Anachronox*, I've actually gone back and picked up a copy of *Vampire: The Masquerade — Redemption*. Currently, I'm still in the Medieval part of the game. I just can't wait to get to the present-day part so I can ditch the broadsword and get my hands on a real weapon.



JEREMY >>> It takes a lot of spark from an RTS to hold my attention, and *Emperor: Battle for Dune* has succeeded. The graphics are definitely slick, and the mission difficulty is well-scaled. And then there's this little thing I bought called a Game Boy Advance. It's pretty cool — especially the version of *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*.



JOE >>> There's nothing like a good old game of *Half-Life*, and after finishing *Blue Shift* in, oh, less than two hours, I realized that *there's nothing like a good old game of Half-Life... PCG* is ready for another match against a clan in *Day of Defeat*. Do you think your team is good enough? Email me at *joe@pcgamer.com*. We'll take on anyone.



CHIAKI >>> I love RTSs, RPGs, and god games, so I never thought I'd play in an FPS tournament. Then *Day of Defeat* came into my life. Li "protector of the innocent" Kuo set up a game against a clan and, to my surprise, there I was playing *DoD* for the first time. Ahhh...the joys of mowing down people with a BAR. There's nothing quite like it.



GREG >>> The traitorous scum that I am, I've been playing games on my new Game Boy Advance this month. Well, let me rephrase that — I'd be playing games on my new Game Boy Advance if I could actually see anything on the screen. How about including a frickin' backlight, Nintendo? Am I really asking so much?

NEWS

MAJESTIC GETS SCOOPED

How Spielberg's *A.I.* beat EA to the punch

Chances are you've heard of Electronic Arts' upcoming online game *Majestic*, the game that will email you, call you, and even threaten you. You'll make long-distance phone calls, find clues to access voice-mail boxes, uncover hidden web pages, and even be sent video clips. *Majestic* was looking to be more original, radical, and ambitious than anything we've seen. But that was before a team of 50 programmers from Microsoft got together with DreamWorks SKG for Steven Spielberg's new movie, *A.I.*, and surreptitiously started building a similar game environment.



One of the many web pages that make up the *A.I.* web game.

Like most good ideas, it started small. A few people noticed that certain letters on *A.I.* movie posters were highlighted or marked. A quick rearranging of those words spelled out "Jeanine was the key" and "Evan Chan was murdered." Using some pointed web browses, a few movie fans began to unravel a web-based "game" that did everything *Majestic* plans to do...and for free. Now, thousands of web pages have been linked to this interactive *A.I.* mystery, code-named "The Beast," and thousands of people are playing it. A group of players even formed Cloudmakers.org, an online club devoted to solving the mystery. Since they first started around March of this year, they've solved almost all of the 68 puzzles they've found and have grown to 5,000 members.

EA had no comment for us, but you can bet they're feeling the sting of getting scooped by Microsoft. Now they'll have to convince us that we want to pay for a game that another company did for free. Even for EA, that's no easy task.



If you're not twisted you will be
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IMAGINEERING
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB


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after you ride it.
Ultimate Ride
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WEBISODIC GAMING REVOLUTION

Some of the industry's brightest minds are hard at work on a whole new way to experience PC games — episodically, in TV-style installments. Will "webisodic" be the way we all play? *PC Gamer* investigates a revolutionary new way for games to hit the mainstream — and a mega-money gamble by start-up companies looking to be the "TV networks" of gaming.

By Suzanne Ashe and Daniel Morris

Most of the world tunes in every week for the next installment of their favorite TV shows. Episodic programming is the time-tested model for televised series, but in the hands of a new breed of interactive-entertainment companies, it might also become the next big thing in PC games.

The democratic medium of the Internet is already fertile ground for downloadable entertainment. Over the past several years, dozens of companies have attempted to deliver attractive and compelling games online, but they've been largely hamstrung by download waits, bandwidth restrictions, and the second-tier quality of most made-for-Internet games. For the most part, it hasn't been practical to deliver full-blown, action-packed, story-driven, 800MB computer games over a 56K modem.

But that's all changing — and as the technology to deliver streaming or rapidly downloadable games matures, so are the business models of the outfits poised to launch gaming into the mass-market mainstream. EA.com plans to do this with its corporate espionage thriller *Majestic*, and *Ultima*'s creator, Richard Garriott, recently told us that the episodic distribution model is the future of gaming. (See last month's Eyewitness section for the full story.) Who else has their eyes on the broadband prize? *PC Gamer* profiles three companies distributing episodic games over the Internet — companies with big talent onboard and big plans. Time will tell which approach will set the next standard for online gaming, but here are three visions of a PC gaming format that closely mirrors the appeal and accessibility of episodic televised entertainment — *webisodic* games.



BETTY BAD

Genre: Sci-fi action
Premise: Elizabeth "Betty" Badowski fights her way through a chaotic far future in this third-person action romp from former id artist Paul Steed.

WILDTANGENT

Alex St. John made his millions as one of Microsoft's longtime resident geniuses, heading up the creation of DirectX. In his post-Microsoft life, he's the co-founder and CEO of WildTangent, a Redmond-based start-up devoted to developing streaming web-based games. Now he oversees a unique marriage between tech-focused development and the more esoteric world of game design.

"A big part of my job has been making sure these two cultures don't collide," says St. John, with a smile. "I have a bunch of ex-Microsofties working on deliverables and timetables, alongside games folks who have big ideas and sometimes no plan for executing them."

WildTangent hopes to offer retail-quality games in downloadable episodes less than 5MB each.

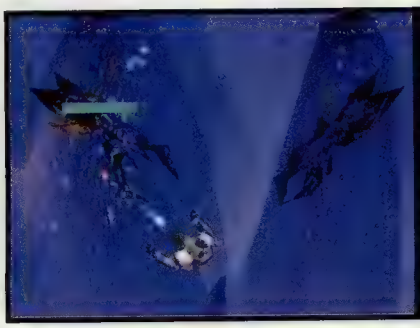
So far, it looks like a successful union. By adding some game developers with A-list titles to their credit, WildTangent is hoping to deliver retail-quality games in downloadable episodes less than 5MB each.

When Phil Shenk set out to tackle a new project after the launch of *Diablo II* (on which he was the lead character artist), he was looking to get back to the roots of game development. He found that ground-level, indie environment working on a new real-time strategy game called *Dark Orbit*, to be launched this summer.

Dark Orbit will be the first full-sized downloadable game for WildTangent, to be followed by ex-id Software modeler Paul Steed's third-person shooter *Betty Bad*.

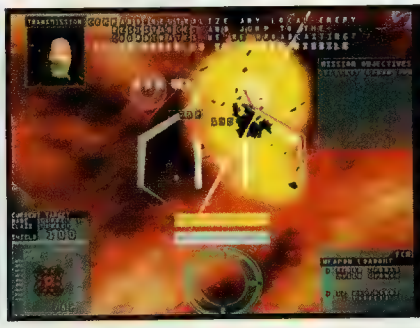
Apart from their commitment to wooing established design talent, WildTangent's first concern is download size. The goal is to produce small episodes that can be quickly accessed by web surfers. Dropping the cinematics and pre-recorded soundtracks that take up such vast amounts of room on retail CD-ROM games, WildTangent's games will download in a matter of minutes. The company's targeting the casual gamer,

Want to build an episodic game? WildTangent licenses its technology for free. It even provides developer support.



DARK ORBIT

Genre: "*Diablo* in space"
Premise: You're the sole survivor of a space-colony massacre at the hands of grotesque aliens. Now you have to pilot a combat vehicle through the planet's infested canyons. Can you make it out?



SABREWING

Genre: Space sim
Premise: Head into space and dive into interstellar dogfights against the invading menace of the Grom armada. It's fast-paced, far-future space action, sending you to sort out these alien scum.



ARUSH's *Primal Prey* is a web-only tour through a 3D hunting ground populated by dinosaurs.

someone who has only a few minutes a day or a few hours a week to play, and who doesn't want to wade through thick manuals.

WildTangent approaches its games with the mentality of a TV network: While people are playing one episode of a game, the company is building the next. "Gamers won't have to wait two or three years for a sequel to come out," says Shenk. "We're generally producing these games faster, within three to five months, and with much smaller teams."

The developer uses the "first is free, pay for the rest" billing system. They discarded the idea of "micro-payments" — whereby you'd be charged for time spent playing the game — because they didn't want gamers to be distracted by having to watch the clock as they played. The exact price per episode remains to be determined, but the company aims to keep it as low as possible.

Shenk and Steed are also willing to incorporate players' ideas, right down to games' evolving plots. "The beauty of episodic release is that players can dictate where they'd like to see things go. We can respond to their feedback and let them participate in crafting the result."

Each episode of a game is designed to last around 20 minutes, roughly the length of a half-hour TV show. WildTangent's proprietary design tools allow small development teams to quickly and cheaply pump new content into the existing graphics- and physics-engine templates. New episodes can be churned out with ease.

The company's other significant revenue play involves tie-ins with Hollywood movies. Its *A Knight's Tale* play-by-email mini-game was a huge "viral" success, driving hundreds of thousands of people to websites promoting the action flick. WildTangent received funding from Sony Pictures to help cement development in this new area of low-cost, high-marketability "promotional" games.

ARUSH

The release of *Monkey Brains*, a webisodic game from ARUSH Entertainment (formerly WEB Corp.), was a much bigger success than ARUSH expected. This *Mario*-style platformer, which plays out over six "apeisodes," debuted earlier this year on Real.com to hundreds of thousands of downloads.

ARUSH has since developed a proprietary online game delivery system, the "Game Capsule," to push this success even further. The company has its sights set on the broadband revolution — and it hopes Game Capsules will become broadband's standard in downloadable entertainment.

"We worked really closely with the guys at RealNetworks and have developed something really unique," says ARUSH President Jim Perkins, formerly of FormGen and GT Interactive. "A lot of people are starting to get broadband connections now. The biggest challenge is turning the casual gamer into a paying player. We are trying to make the content as original as possible. Branding is critical."

The Game Capsule interface walks you through the download process, securing a credit card and even getting parents to fax in "permission" for young gamers. The capsule also provides built-in piracy protection for developers — players can download a game only three times.

"Most sites are limited in their ability to charge customers, and there was no security," Perkins explains. "A lot of tech sites have found it hard to wean themselves off of advertising."

Simple to navigate and quick to download, the Game Capsule technology isn't just targeted at hardcore gaming sites. "Let's say you're a fishing-lure manufacturer and you want to drive folks to your site," Perkins says. "You'll be able to offer a fishing game on your site using our technology. The whole idea behind the fishing game is, Who wouldn't want to be fishing while they're at work?"

The prospects don't end with sports and recreation industries. Music and movie promotions, and products as far-ranging as automobiles and cola, can launch interactive areas of their consumer websites.

But ARUSH intends to dominate the online gaming market as well. This fall, it will launch the much-hyped *Duke Nukem: Manhattan Project*. In this stripped-down shooter based on one of the PC's most recognizable characters, you'll be able to "Duke" it out as the muscle-bound hero fights his arch-nemesis, Dr. Proton.

Perkins is obviously very happy to be sending a familiar character into these scarcely charted waters. He also uses the



In ARUSH's *Feedn' Chloe*, you have to hunt wild critters to keep your wife fed.



Monkey Brains, a platform adventure that harks back to simpler joys, was a big success for ARUSH.

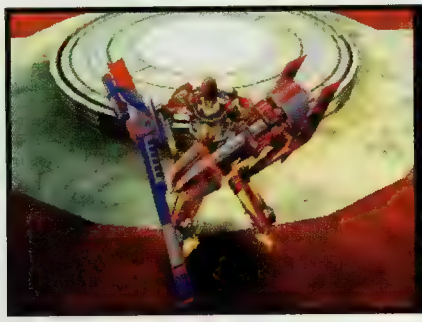


Right now, one of the web's most popular games is RealArcade's *3D Billiards*.

According to IDC, the number of online gamers is expected to grow from 39 million worldwide in 2000 to 74.7 million in 2004.

TV analogy, banking that Duke is a good bet "because it's like getting people to tune in to their favorite TV show." Once they've finished an episode, the next in the continuing series is ready for them to download.

The beauty of the webisodic model, in the case of both WildTangent and ARUSH, is that each title can be treated very much as a television-series pilot — a relatively cheap investment in an idea, which can always be snuffed if the audience doesn't go for it. Because webisodic development is so much cheaper than hardcore retail-game development, a game can be market-tested in this fashion — without costing millions in lengthy development budgets.



TEX ATOMIC'S BIG BOT BATTLES

Genre: Mech combat
Premise: Play super-sized Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots with an impressively *MechWarrior*-esque combat game powered by the LithTech engine. Mech mine *Tex Atomic*!

With Duke as its flag-bearer, ARUSH plans to be the branding leader of the emerging competition for webisodic dollars. Already, we can see the network mentality being put to a crucial test: The star of the show is everything.

REALARCADE

RealNetworks hopes to corner the market on downloadable web games through the distribution channel it launched last spring. With 180 million registered users, Real is concentrating most of its marketing effort on its own site. And with Games Bazaar, it's providing support for developers to get new content online.

"Our technology compressed audio, video, and .WAV files down to the size of three MP3 files," explains Paul Thelan, RealNetworks' group product manager.

The plethora of games offered on RealArcade range from sports to puzzles to turn-based strategy. The textures and graphics are near–CD-ROM quality, and you don't need a ninja PC and a T1 line to download and run the games. If a phone connection is interrupted during download, the file is paused, and your machine resumes downloading the remainder of the game when you reconnect. A subscription to the RealArcade site will spare you the headache of pop-up ads. (Another key tweak to the TV-network model: In the webisodic world, you'll have the option of paying a bit more each month to eliminate the advertising that usually clutters your entertainment.)

Once you've subscribed to RealArcade, the program first does a sweep of your hard drive and then catalogs all of the multiplayer games it finds for access on an interface called "My Games." This interface also lets you view the list of players logged into the GameSpy network, with which RealArcade is partnered, enabling easy multiplayer setup. A big believer in the multiplayer phenomenon, RealArcade is hoping to be the early leader in quick-downloading, small-install multiplayer games.

Real learned many of its lessons by championing the spread of quick-download video and sound files over the Internet. ("We've done focus-group tests that determined the word most commonly associated with Real — 'buffering,'" jokes Thelan.) Real is a company with a massive commitment to the idea that anyone — from the hardcore gamer to the most casual web surfer — is familiar with a quick, RealVideo-style download. By making games as simple and painless to access as a RealVideo download, and by using GameSpy to make multiplayer match-ups just as easy, RealArcade hopes to establish dominance over the webisodic market.

GET READY FOR SWEEPS?

After downloading and playing a selection of the games currently available from WildTangent (*SabreWing, Dark Orbit*), ARUSH (*Monkey Brains, Feedn' Chloe*), and RealArcade (*3D Billiards, Tex Atomic's Big Bot Battles*), we can safely say that none of the services offers a significant download-speed or ease-of-use advantage over the others. While each is a subtly different model, they're all comparable in terms of wait times and simplicity of navigation.

That means it's all about the games.

Following the "competing networks" analogy, all three of these players have succeeded in their attempts to create user-friendly interfaces and rapid downloads. They have, in essence, set up "channels" that can be accessed as easily as any of the others. And so, as with the TV networks before them, these companies now face the eternal challenge of how to entertain us better than their competitors can.

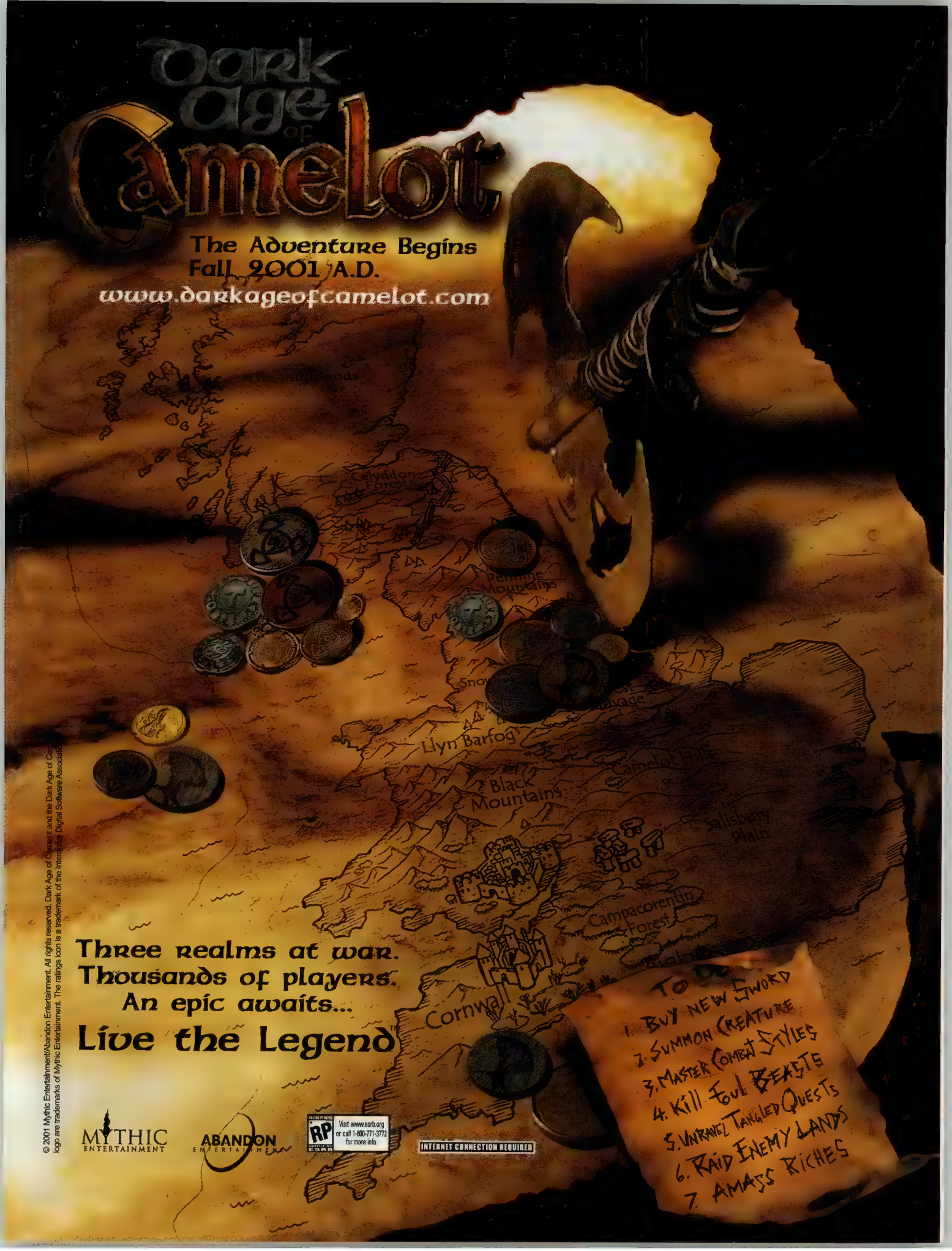
WildTangent's strategy banks on proven design talents and Hollywood tie-ins. ARUSH is betting on the branding strength of established characters and properties. RealArcade is looking to corner the multiplayer webisodic market. Within this general framework, we're poised to see a battle to win the attention of a large and growing mass of mainstream web gamers.

If gaming ever truly evolves into an entertainment medium rivaling the scope and profitability of broadcast programming, it may well be these first steps into the realm of webisodic delivery that set the pendulum in motion. It's a rare opportunity for gamers of every stripe to watch entertainment history unfold, right under our fingertips. PCG



RealArcade's *RC Daredevil* puts you at the helm of remote-controlled planes.

Parlez vous game? Downloadable episodic games are now available in 19 different countries, in over a dozen languages.


Dark Age of Camelot
The Adventure Begins
Fall 2001 A.D.
www.darkageofcamelot.com
Celydon Forest
Llyn Barfog
Black Mountains
Camelot Hills
Salisbury Plain
Campacorentin Forest
Cornwall
Three realms at war.
Thousands of players.
An epic awaits...
Live the Legend
To Do
1. Buy New Sword
2. Summon Creature
3. Master Combat Styles
4. Kill Foul Beasts
5. Unravel Tangled Quests
6. Raid Enemy Lands
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RATING SYSTEM

Only the greatest games should receive our coveted Editors' Choice award, and our rating system reflects that. With a quick glance at the score box in each review, you can see where the game fits into the great gaming scheme of quality.

90% — **100%–90% EDITORS' CHOICE**
It's not easy to get here, and it's darn near impossible to get a score near 100%. A game in this range comes with our unqualified recommendation, and is an absolute must-buy.

80% — **89%–80% EXCELLENT**
These are excellent games. Anything that scores in this range is well worth your purchase, and is likely a great example of its genre. This scoring range is also where we might reward specialist/niche games that are real breakthroughs in their own way.

70% — **79%–70% GOOD**
These are pretty good games that we'd recommend to fans of the particular genre, though it's a safe bet you can find better options.

60% — **69%–60% ABOVE AVERAGE**
Reasonable, above-average games. They might be worth buying, but they probably have a few significant flaws that limit their appeal.

50% — **59%–50% MERELY OKAY**
Very ordinary games. They're not completely worthless, but there are likely numerous better places to spend your gaming dollar.

40% — **49%–40% TOLERABLE**
Poor quality. Only a few slightly redeeming features keep these games from falling into the abyss of the next category.

30% — **39%–0% DON'T BOTHER**
Just terrible. And the lower you go, the more worthless you get. Avoid these titles like the plague, and don't say we didn't warn you!

HARDWARE REQUIREMENTS

With each *PC Gamer* review, you'll find two very important pieces of information: the game's minimum hardware requirements and the hardware configurations we recommend as the *least* you'll need to really enjoy the game. While a game will run on the minimum system the manufacturer specifies, it might not run all that well. Because of this, we test each game on several systems so we can bring you a more realistic assessment of the horsepower you'll *really* need.

Fossil Find Confirms: Coconut Monkey Is Missing Link



The controversial fossil jawbone that links Coconut Monkeys to the evolutionary tree of modern man.

BERKELEY, CA. — Paleontologists at UC Berkeley's Leakey Center for Prehistoric Primate Studies announced today the identification of a fossil jawbone belonging to a previously undiscovered primate that could well be the "missing link" between early Paleolithic animals and modern man.

The ancient primate, called Homo coconutia, apparently subsisted only on coconuts. "We can tell this from the peculiarities of its jaw structure," said Dr. Susan Leakey, head of the center's research team. "We're also fairly sure that he had no hands."

The profundity of the discovery was not lost on a proud Coconut Monkey, the famed game developer who apparently descends from this long-lost missing link.

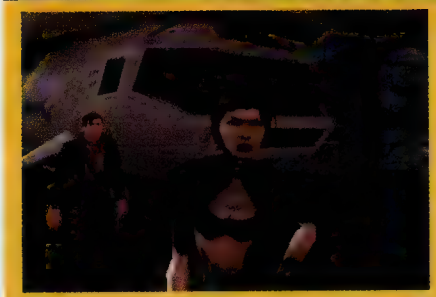
"I am honored and a bit humbled to be the last of this breed," said Coconut Monkey in a statement issued shortly after the Leakey Center announced its findings. "As you can see, I have no hands. And my coconut-based nature is also readily apparent. As this undoubtedly makes me the most anthropologically vital organism currently alive or dead, I have nothing but gratitude for the Leakey Center team."

Several fundamentalist religious groups met these announcements with organized demonstrations, demanding an apology from the Leakey Center and an immediate boycott of Coconut Monkey's games. Leaders of the Houston-based Monkey-Free Family Tree are calling for publishers to scrap Coconut Monkey's upcoming *Gravy Trader*.

For his part, Coconut Monkey has publicly ignored this latest controversy, choosing to focus instead on what he calls "the increasingly historic undertaking that is *Gravy Trader*. The world has waited 2 million years for it...it can wait a bit more."

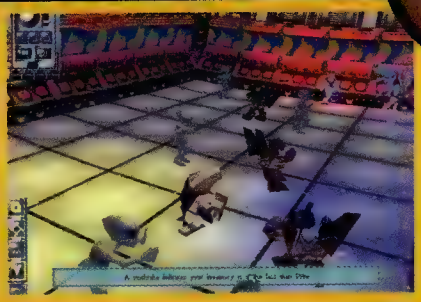


DON'T MISS...



ANACHRONOX pg. 56

Years in the making, Tom Hall's epic science-fiction RPG is finally with us. And in stark contrast to that other ill-fated ION Storm–Dallas release, ***Anachronox*** proves to have been well worth the wait. Huge and colorful, and filled with great characters, it earns its makers big kudos.



STARTOPIA pg. 102

Become a contract developer for space stations of the far future in this new strategy game from Mucky Foot. With a tongue-in-cheek attitude and tons of objects to place, ***Startopia*** makes you responsible for the creation of functioning stations inhabited by all manner of alien weirdness.

ESRB RATINGS Starting with this issue, we'll be supplying the ESRB rating of each of the games we review on the Category line in the "Useful Info" box. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) is an industry association that provides parents with useful guides to the maturity level of the games available on store shelves. A rating of "E" (for "Everyone") indicates that a game is suitable for all ages. A game rated "T" (for Teen) may contain some objectionable material, and you should examine the box for specific content guidelines before purchasing it. An "M" rating (for "Mature") indicates that a game is not suitable for minors. "RP" indicates "Rating Pending."

EB TOTAL

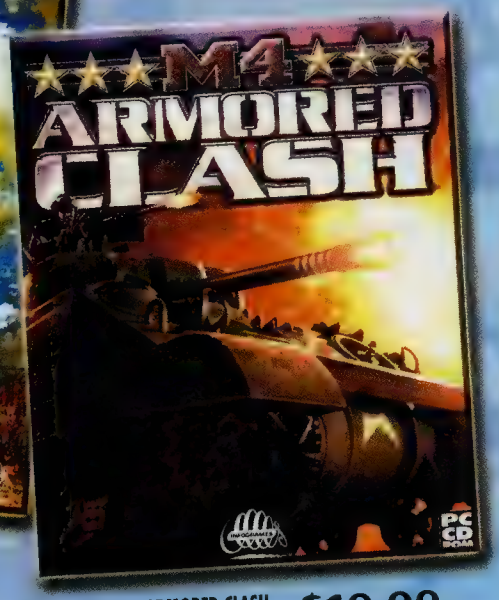
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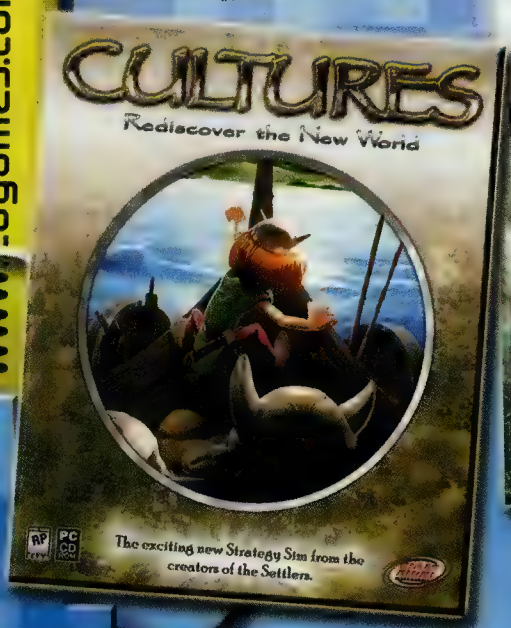
WWII ONLINE: BLITZKRIEG
WINDOWS CD ROM
STRATEGY FIRST
#198022-6
$44.99



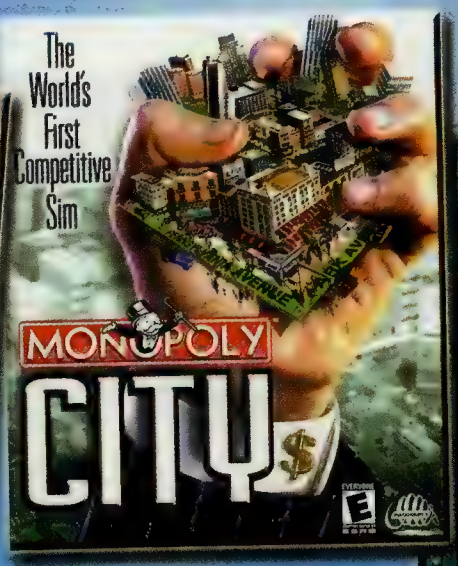
DESPERADOS
WINDOWS CD ROM
STRATEGY FIRST
#198668-6
$29.99



M4 ARMORED CLASH
WINDOWS CD ROM
STRATEGY FIRST
#205702-4
$19.99



CULTURES
WINDOWS CD ROM
INFOGRAMES
#205477-3
$39.99

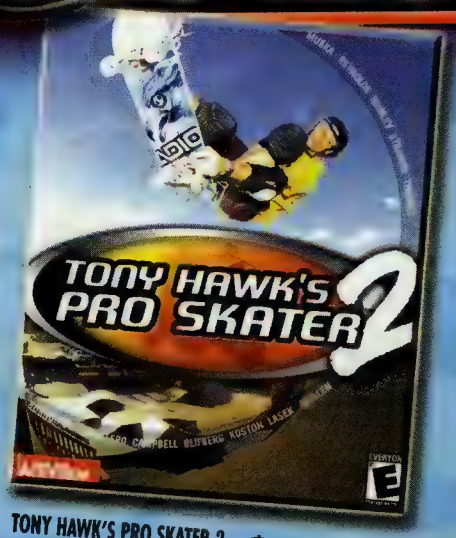


MONOPOLY CITY
WINDOWS CD ROM
INFOGRAMES
#203574-9
$44.99

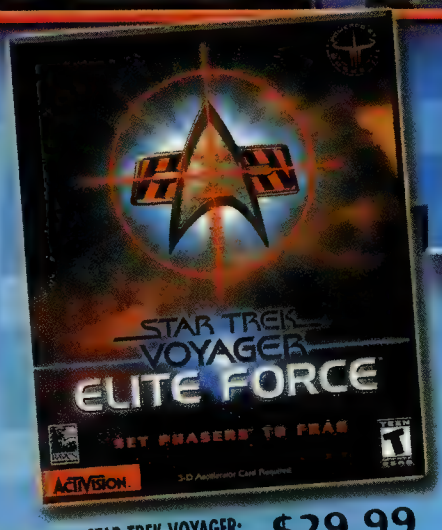


EDGE OF CHAOS:
INDEPENDENCE WAR 2
WINDOWS CD ROM
INFOGRAMES
#198670-2
$39.99

IMMERSION



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2
WINDOWS CD ROM
ACTIVISION
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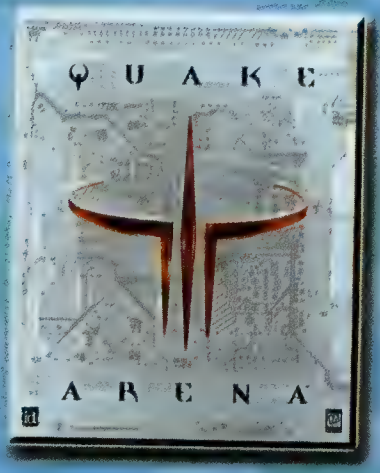
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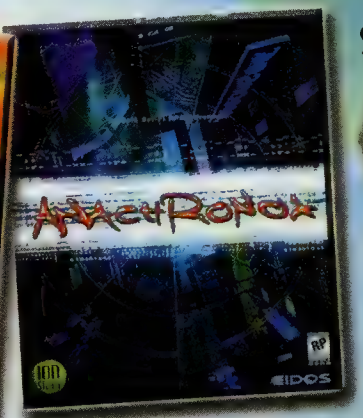
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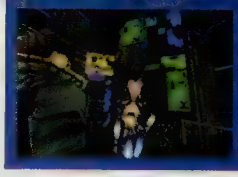
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Anachronox

YOU SPEAK CRAZY



See those signs? They're written in the bizarre alien language that ION Storm's Tom Hall invented for *Anachronox*. Don't worry — you won't have to decipher those symbols to beat the game

***Final Fantasy* gameplay meets *Deus Ex* interactivity in this long-awaited RPG epic.**

If someone walked up to me right now and asked for a quick game recommendation, I'd tell them to play *Anachronox* without a moment's hesitation. It wouldn't matter if the person were a shooter addict, a sim nut, or a sports fan. *Anachronox* is worth every hour of playtime you put into it and has enough appeal to put a smile on anyone's face.

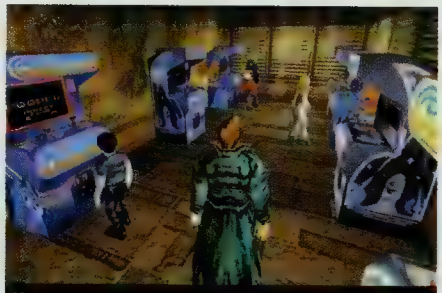
USEFUL INFO

CATEGORY	Roleplaying (T)
DEVELOPER	ION Storm
PUBLISHER	Eidos Interactive
MINIMUM	PII-266, 64MB RAM, 350MB HD, 12MB 3D card
RECOMMENDED	PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D card
MAXIMUM PLAYERS	1

True, it's been in development hell for the past few years, but now we can finally partake of the fruit of ION Storm's labor. And the fruit is sweet.

It all starts in a dingy office above a rundown bar on an artificial planet at the center of the universe — Anachronox (not the new ION Storm office). You first see Silvestro Bucelli, also known as Sly Boots, lying on the floor of his detective agency, getting the snot beat out of him by a mob thug. Boots is a bit down on his luck. He's broke, he owes money to the local mob, and his robot sidekick, PAL 18, is out of batteries. It's up to you to help him get back on his feet.

From this humble start, *Anachronox* slowly grows in both depth and scale. You'll scavenge through every nook and cranny of the futuristic world of Anachronox, stroll through the streets and cities of three different planets, and visit a mix of space stations and battleships. It's all powered by the old, brown *Quake II* engine. That's no typo. But this puppy's been tweaked so much that you'll see it doing tricks you never knew were possible with Carmack's old toy, from spectacular particle effects to moody lighting.



You can actually play some of the games in this arcade, such as *Zong*, *Pooper*, and *Bugaboo*.



Grumpos is one of the first characters to join your team. He hides a deadly secret...

Some characters are blocky and texture resolutions are low, but the overall look is terrific. All that development time has evidently been spent building maps that are incredibly well-structured. Cities are filled with pedestrians, shops, and traffic. Space stations look slick and futuristic, and the dungeons are vast and challenging. The sound isn't as impressive, but the music is excellent — almost good enough for me to wish the tunes were CD audio tracks so I could make MP3s out of them.

As a roleplaying game, *Anachronox* has more in common with console-style RPGs such as *Final Fantasy* and *Chrono Trigger* than with *Baldur's Gate II*. You could call it "roleplaying lite." You don't have to worry about whether a certain weapon does "4D6 +10 against fairies" or whether you have enough contingency spells prepared for your next fight. Instead, it's all presented in a way anyone new to roleplaying can easily pick up. All commands are issued through a simple point-and-click icon-based system. No fancy mouse movements or keystrokes are required.

Combat is a mix of real-time and turn-based battle that anyone familiar with Squaresoft's Active Time Battle system will recognize instantly. Basically, each character has a bar that charges as time passes. When it's fully charged, you can issue an order to that character, such as attack or move. This action is presented from a third-person over-the-shoulder perspective.

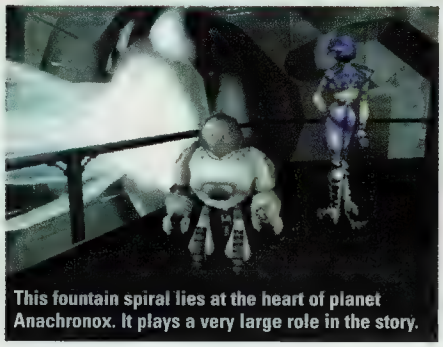
The sheer volume of gaming that *Anachronox* provides is enough to make your head spin. You'll do everything from vote in a planetary election to defend an ancient city against invaders from another timeline. You'll receive self-defense training to help you survive the tough streets of Southern Anachronox, hunt down an abominable snowman, and take on a ruthless crime syndicate. One especially brilliant bit has you getting captured by a comic-book supervillain and teaming up with a band of superheroes to escape. During this part of the game all the text appears in comic book–style speech bubbles, with handwritten letters and all.



This tower is just one example of the game's incredible structure design



Your enemies range from scary to quirky. Check out these angry little wrestler dudes.



This fountain spiral lies at the heart of planet Anachronox. It plays a very large role in the story.



Having a superhero on your team is just too cool. Paco here packs a mean left hook.

By the end of the 30 hours of gameplay you'll have seen one planet's destruction, solved an ancient mystery concerning the origins of the alien technology MysTech, and, yep, saved the universe from destruction.

Anachronox is very well-paced, and it performs a delicate balancing act — dishing out dungeons and quests, along with flashbacks and cut-scenes, in just the right amounts. You can play for hours and still be craving more.

What also helps is how memorable, original, and likable some of the characters are. Sure, some of them are just rehashed clichés — starting with Boots, the down-and-out private investigator, and PAL 18, the self-aware robot that just wants to be loved. But then there's Democratus, a sentient planet that shrinks itself down and joins your team after you save it from destruction, and Paco, a buffed-out superhero in tights who's suffering from an extreme case of the crimefightin' blues.

This is a colorful and compelling group of people: you'll want to know as much as you can about them. Every cut-scene and flashback is a treat. Topping it all off is a script as funny as anything since the *Monkey Island* series.

Sadly, there is a great wrong done here. Despite all the years in development, *Anachronox* has still managed to ship with a load of bugs. I ran into problems with starting the game, puzzles resetting when I left certain levels, events not happening when I did puzzles in a different order, and characters walking through walls. One bug caused my character to "fall" out of a level into oblivion. Because of these numerous bugs, I just can't bring myself to give *Anachronox* an Editors' Choice award. However, the game's project leader, Tom Hall, has assured us that all the bugs have been fixed in the game's 1.1 patch, which should be available now, so if you do buy *Anachronox*, make sure you patch it right away.

The game may have shipped somewhat unfinished, but I still highly recommend it. If you give it half a chance, it'll grab your attention and suck away your weekends.

— Li C. Kuo



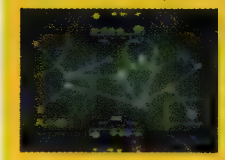
During combat, each character has a special super move. These moves range from devastating attacks to defensive healing spells.

A GAME WITHIN A GAME



Can you think of any other games where you can dance at a strip club for money?

Like the many Squaresoft RPGs that it's modeled after, *Anachronox* is chock-full of arcade-style mini-games. One, in which you do your own boogaloo in a strip club (don't worry — you don't have to do the full monty), controls like *PaRappa Da Rappa*, while another is a glorified version of *Missile Command*. *Ox* (left) is a simple table-top strategy game. Mini-games are also involved in your character's world skills. These world skills are special non-combat abilities that are unique to each character: Boots can pick locks, PAL 18 can hack into computers, and so on.



To perform these skills, you have to play a mini-game successfully. These games are usually timed events that get easier or harder depending on your skill level. For example, if you're a master lockpick, you'll have more time to pick locks. Simple as these games are, they're actually a nice change of pace when you encounter them, and are a welcome challenge.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Epic story; a whole lotta game; colorful characters; genuinely fun gameplay.

LOWS: Buggy as hell; *Quake II* engine shows occasional signs of wear.

BOTTOM LINE: Fun, funny, and cool. A good time for any gamer. (Just be sure to patch it.)

PC GAMER 88%
EXCELLENT

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LOTUS CLAN

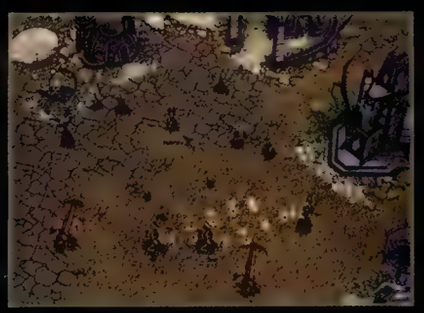
UNIQUE CHARACTERS

Build an army one warrior at a time. Choose them wisely and manage each unit carefully. Train and develop every unique member of your battle forces, for they are the life-blood and protectors of your clan.

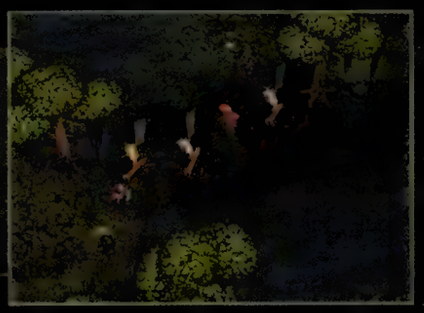


ANSWER TO YOU.

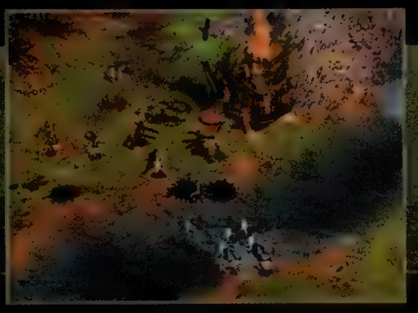




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Power Spike Pro Beach Volleyball

CATEGORY Sports (E) **DEVELOPER** Carapace **PUBLISHER** Infogrames **REQUIRED** PII 300, 32MB RAM, 240MB HD, 3D card **WE RECOMMEND** 64MB RAM **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 2

Two-on-two Pro Beach Volleyball may still be a relatively new sport, but its central premise can't be beat: young, fit athletes competing in bikinis *[even the men? — Ed.]*. *Power Spike* gives PC gamers a chance to get in on this officially licensed action — all the basic serves, bumps, passes, and spikes are here, and control is a relatively simple matter. As far as the basics of volleyball go, the gameplay isn't terrible.

But this PlayStation port manages to foul up with its uninspired graphics. Despite the opportunity to make some visual improvements for the PC version, player models are barely on par with those of ancient PlayStation games. Character animations come in short, sluggish spurts — they look like they're strobing at times. The game offers different locales like Rio and Sydney (most of which have to be unlocked), but they're nothing special. Around 50 pro players are available, but in name only — Gabrielle Reece is the only character that bares any resemblance to the real-life counterpart. A player editor is included, but the options on this feature are slim. Simply put, the game suffers from a serious case of port-itis.



It takes special effort to make hottie volleyball players look this bad.



Nope, doesn't look any better here, either.

Basic game modes include exhibition and world-tournament, but it's hard to work up much enthusiasm for winning a tourney. Video cut-scenes provide consolation flesh-parades when the in-game action gets tedious. At least you've got babes, sand, and sun.

When all's said and done, the lackluster graphics and so-so gameplay defeat a game with promising subject matter. Not even Gabby Reece's hot picture on the box will do *Power Spike* much good — there are better pics on the Internet.

— Norman Chan

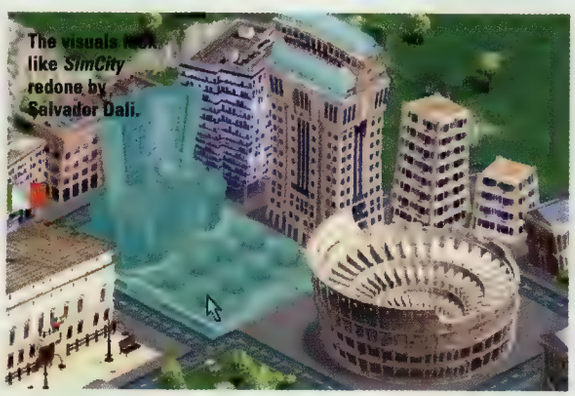
PC GAMER 51% MERELY OKAY

Political Tycoon

CATEGORY Real-time strategy (E) **DEVELOPER** Monte Cristo **PUBLISHER** Monte Cristo **REQUIRED** P200, 32MB RAM, 200MB HD **WE RECOMMEND** PII 450 **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 5

French developer Monte Cristo, noted for its economic sims, has just released this complex and original spin on the classic board game Diplomacy. And guess what? It's great.

Political Tycoon casts you as the leader of a modern nation. The international-intrigue game unfolds in real time as you select from a range of activities that include building, production, research, trade deals, international diplomacy, espionage, and war.

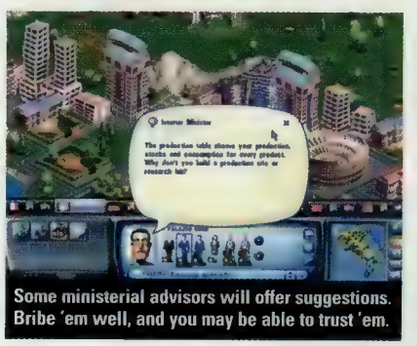


The visuals look like *SimCity* redone by Salvador Dali.

You get eight separate single-player scenarios, each pitting you against eight competing nations. There are also three multiplayer scenarios for up to five players on the Internet or via a network.

Gameplay is totally non-linear, and you're free to investigate all of the delightfully nasty options available to you in your bid for power. You can drop spies to infiltrate and blow up foreign facilities, or use diplomatic credits, threats, and sweet deals to arrange a joint censure motion against a particular enemy. The graphics are delightfully surrealistic, and the underlying number-crunching and opponent AI is handled with aplomb.

The game does have a serious problem — it marches along at too fast a clip for most diplomatic endeavors, even when set to Slow. There's a great deal to track, and when you let a trade offer sit for too long, it vanishes. Pausing the game makes accessing the various options impossible.



Some ministerial advisors will offer suggestions. Bribe 'em well, and you may be able to trust 'em.

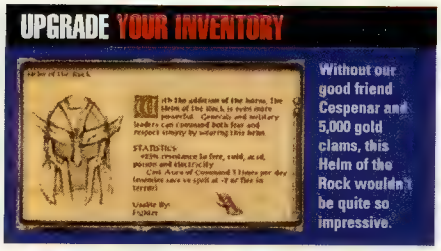
So expect a steep learning curve, despite a series of short tutorials and a good manual. But if you want a delightfully different kind of real-time strategy game, *Political Tycoon* impresses.

— Barry Brenesal

PC GAMER 81% EXCELLENT

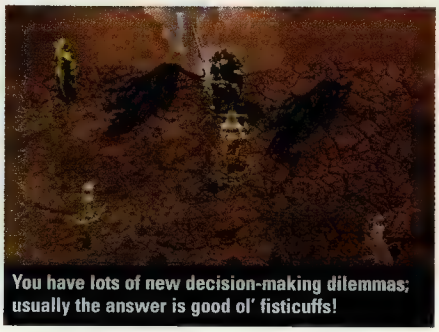
Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal

BioWare does it again, bringing this epic series to a satisfying conclusion.




Nearly every room in the new Watcher's Keep dungeon holds a nasty, challenging surprise. Go here first if you need to build up experience points!


Add and replace members of your party at will. The volunteers include our friends from *BG* and *BGII*.


You have lots of new decision-making dilemmas; usually the answer is good ol' fisticuffs!

USEFUL INFO

CATEGORY	Roleplaying (T)
DEVELOPER	BioWare
PUBLISHER	Interplay
REQUIRED	PII 233, 32MB RAM, 325MB HD, *Baldur's Gate II*
WE RECOMMEND	PII 400, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D card
MAXIMUM PLAYERS	6

The highly anticipated add-on to *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn* has finally arrived, and *Throne of Bhaal* will be a delight to series stalwarts. Finishing the prior games is not a *requirement* to play *Bhaal*, though you'll need to have *BGII* installed. But having played *BGII* will make the denouement that much more satisfying, as this is really the final installment in the trilogy and it brings the series' epic storyline to a close in grand fashion.

As soon as you load the game, you'll have to worry about all sorts of extremely large, deadly beasts — 40 of 'em new to the series. You'll definitely want to import a veteran team of dungeon-crawlers from *BGII* to take advantage of the 8 million experience-point cap (which translates into 40th-level characters) that *Bhaal* imposes.

The journey is *extremely* tough from the get-go, and rightly so — this game represents the conclusion to 300-plus total hours of gameplay (*BG* and *BGII* combined), after all.

You get 80 new areas to check out, 50 new spells, and 100 new items to find. There's even an imp named Cespenar that can upgrade items and/or create new ones from items in your inventory. Not bad for an "add-on," eh?

The new spells — such as Dragon's Breath (just 10th-level, too), which summons the disembodied head of a red dragon to spout a huge 20d10 fireball — are pretty damn impressive. Then there are several new high-level character abilities to choose for your party members as they advance in experience, adding a lot of fun to the level-up process. For instance, pick Greater Deathblow for your Fighter, Paladin, Ranger, Barbarian, or Monk, and they'll kill all 12th-level-and-below baddies with a single strike.

A new character class is introduced as well. The Wild Mage is a spell-caster proficient in the application of Wild magic (i.e., spells have a 5% chance of exploding in a wild surge, causing a completely random — and typically surprising — effect).

Other changes include the ability to erase spells from your spell book (making room for the new ones you find); action feedback (text depicting all of your party's moves in more detail); and a non-pausing map screen (you can finally move across the world map while looking at it). And multi-class characters can now switch between Cleric and Mage spell pages.

These are all relatively minor tweaks, but they should satisfy veteran players. That said, I'd still like to see an in-game bestiary that keeps track of the monsters you fight. And I wish BioWare would ax that damn "gather your party before venturing forth" voiceover! But hey, you can't have everything. Other than a few random crashes to the desktop (a patch was in the works at press time), there really is little to grouse about.

Throne of Bhaal is the next-best thing to a full-fledged *BGII* sequel, and it's a fitting conclusion to an epic series.

— Steve Klett

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Has tons of new stuff for an add-on; cool spells and abilities; new class.

LOWS: May be too challenging for less-experienced players; occasional crashes.

BOTTOM LINE: More a full-fledged sequel than a paltry add-on, *Bhaal* is a must-have for series fans.

PC GAMER 89%
EXCELLENT

Hostile Waters: Antaeus Rising

Blending action and strategy doesn't have to be confusing and complex.

It's the year 2032. Earth is finally at peace and the ways of war have been long forgotten. But the belligerent remnants of the old, violent Earth — known as the Old World Cabal — have declared war on this peaceful new society. Needing a means of defense, the good guys have fished the last of their great battleships, the *Antaeus*, out of the ocean and rebuilt it for one last mission.

USEFUL INFO

CATEGORY	Action/strategy (M)
DEVELOPER	Rage
PUBLISHER	Interplay
REQUIRED	PII 266, 48MB RAM, 340MB HD, 8MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND	PIII 800, 128MB RAM, 565MB HD, 32MB 3D card
MAXIMUM PLAYERS	1

To the delight of many comic-book fans, Warren Ellis, known for his stellar work on *The Authority* and *Transmetropolitan*, was hired to pen the script for *Antaeus Rising*. As a result, the story, told through some gorgeous (but sometimes gory) cut-scenes, has more substance and style than typical gaming fare.

The gameplay is a strange hybrid of action and strategy that places you in the captain's chair of the *Antaeus* battleship. *Hostile Waters* is played through two views. The first is the interior of the *Antaeus*, the "mother ship" from which you launch smaller attack craft. From here, you'll be able to build vehicles and issue orders to your units through a mix of simple menus.

The second view is the tactical screen, which is a chase view of whatever vehicle you're watching or controlling. You can pilot your attack craft, or pause the action to bring up the detailed 3D map on which you can issue commands to AI pilots.

Once you exit the command screen, everything runs in real time. The crux of the game is that at any time you can assume control of any vehicle under your command. You'll eventually have a mix of 11 different vehicles, including tanks, hovercraft, and aircraft, all controlled in a simple arcade-action manner. All the vehicles sport a slick futuristic look, pushed by a very capable graphics engine.

You can deck them out with one of six weapons per vehicle, including machine guns and missile launchers. As you'd guess, anytime you take direct control of a unit, it'll be much more effective than if you let the AI handle the maneuvers.

But the AI isn't totally incompetent. It can dish out the destruction just fine, as long as you lead the units well. The key to beating the 21 missions is to use the right unit and weapon for the job. Send in ground units to take out anti-aircraft weapons, and air units to take out ground units — that's the basic tactical rule of thumb.

The missions themselves offer a bit more variety than the average real-time strategy game, and will have you doing everything from the usual convoy-escort chores to orchestrating the capture of a train full of explosives.

As the plot twists and turns, new units, enemies, and weapons help keep the gameplay interesting. Quite a few heads turned here in the *PC Gamer* office as the graphics engine kicked out terrific vistas and effects, from picturesque glaciers to the blast from an artillery strike. The sound effects are very well done, too, as missiles whiz past your head and explosions pack satisfying levels of bass. Package all this together and you've got a surprisingly fun and playable hybrid that's easily worth your time.

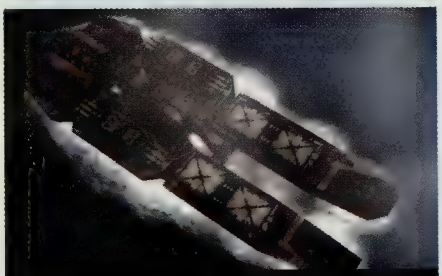
— Li C. Kuo



Taking direct control of your units is where the action is, and where you'll have the most success.



Some weapons are designed only for ground targets, while others are more versatile.



The *Antaeus*, your manufacturing platform and base of operations, can also launch artillery strikes.



You'll have run-ins with M1 tanks, Apache helicopters, strange alien war machines, and more.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Great graphics; gameplay is easy to get into; smart science-fiction story.

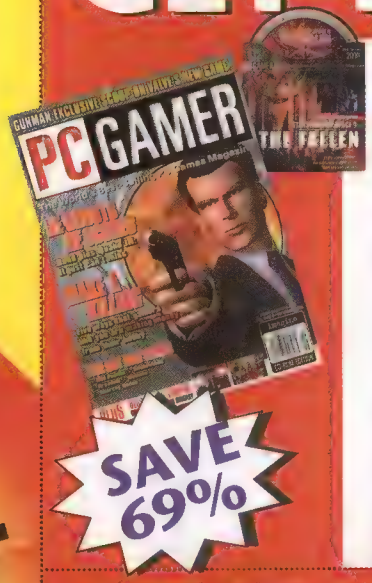
LOWS: Sparse manual; could use more weapon variety; steep system requirements.

BOTTOM LINE: A solid hybrid-genre game that's fun, if not groundbreaking.

PC GAMER 80% EXCELLENT

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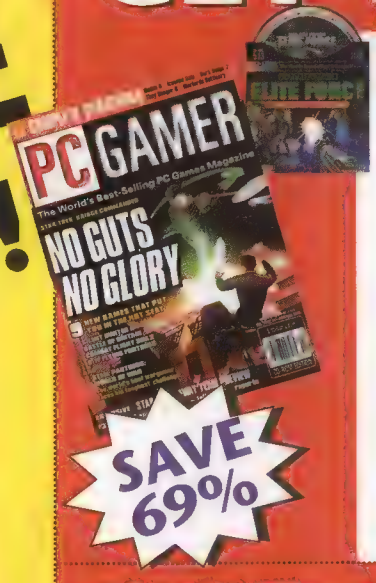
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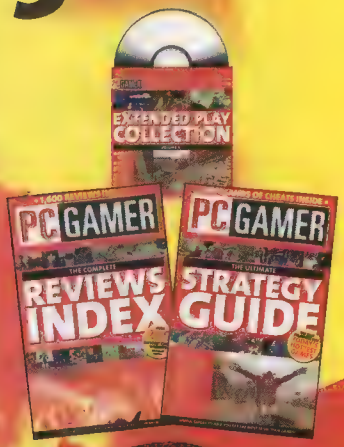
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Dominion Wars

Once the future has been sufficiently patched, there will be Dominion wars...

You know a game's been rushed out the door when the review copy comes packed with a patch. And not one that just fixes the usual hardware incompatibilities, but one that changes play mechanics and repairs dumb mistakes that QA should've spotted immediately. Mix in a skimpy manual that creates more questions than it answers, and you've got yourself one bad day saving the galaxy.

USEFUL INFO

CATEGORY Action/Strategy (E)
DEVELOPER Gizmo Games
PUBLISHER Simon & Schuster Int.
REQUIRED PII 266, 64MB RAM, 150MB HD, 8MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 600MB HD
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 8

Dominion Wars is an action/strategy space sim based on the *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* license. It takes place during the Federation war with the Dominion. Each of these sides has its own campaign consisting of 10 missions, depicting battles talked about on the TV series but never seen.

For me, the trouble began with the noninteractive tutorial. (Developers, listen up: Tutorials must be part of the game!) Many controls either aren't listed in the manual or are completely wrong.

After a lengthy, tedious mission briefing (apparently so that the celebrity voiceover artists can earn their paycheck), you set up your fleet by purchasing ships, captains, modifications, and additional crew with credits earned by successfully completing previous missions. Briefings will either suggest or mandate a set number and type of ships to use, but you can command a maximum of only six ships at a time.

Missions consist of such objectives as escorting transports, defending starbases, destroying shipyards, kidnapping/liberating prisoners, and the like. Ships can be commanded individually or in groups, and each is outfitted with weapons appropriate for the race of the builder (Federation, Klingon, Cardassian, and Jem'Hadar). During combat, you can target key stations such as shields, engines, weapons, or transporters, and it's also possible to forcibly board and commandeer another ship by battering their shields to the point where you can transport a security team aboard.



Dominion Wars' streamlined interface includes a "command ring" to simplify shield, combat, and pursuit commands.

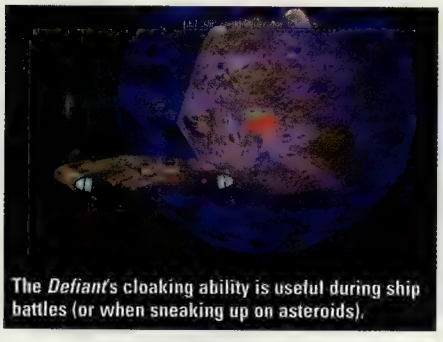
Unfortunately, numerous bugs and quirky inconsistencies are along for this clearly unfinished ride. For example, captains can earn — and use — commendations, but the ways to earn them have to be guessed. Sure, "Cardassian Expert" and "See Cloaked Vessels" are somewhat self-explanatory, but what the hell does "Founders Elite One" mean to you? Secondary missions are alluded to in briefings, but not listed under objectives in the game. Some ship mods have descriptions of what they do, while others don't. Ship AI can be undependable and...well, limited space keeps me from cataloguing the rest, but you get the idea.

Despite myself, I had fun playing *Dominion Wars*. I liked the game's RPG elements (e.g., captain promotion and ship configuration) and the ability to commandeer enemy ships. The multiplayer game is sound, letting you set up either LAN matches or Internet games through GameSpy Arcade.

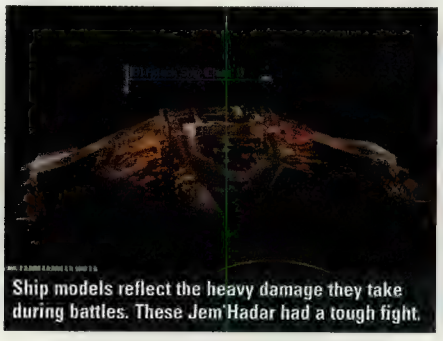
Besides deathmatch mode, you get four inventive multiplayer games, including Find the Founder and Conquest. And using the *Star Trek Starship Creator: Warp II* utility (included with the game), you can design unique ships for use in multiplayer matches.

The current patch, version 1.02, fixes several bugs and makes changes to gameplay (such as slowly revealing upgrades instead of showing them all upfront), but it won't work with v. 1.0 saved games. And even after patching, I experienced crashes, dropped voiceovers, and faulty ship AI. With enough patches, *Dominion Wars* may one day live up to its potential.

— *Chuck Osborn*



The *Defiant*'s cloaking ability is useful during ship battles (or when sneaking up on asteroids).



Ship models reflect the heavy damage they take during battles. These Jem'Hadar had a tough fight.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: RPG/strategy elements complement action; good multiplay; lots of upgrades helps replayability.

LOWS: Insufficient beta-testing; incomplete documentation; unclear objectives; some dull levels.

BOTTOM LINE: If it's ever finished, *DW* may eventually be a satisfying action/strategy game.

PC GAMER **58%**
MERELY OKAY


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Microsoft Train Simulator

All aboard for this charming and detailed railroad sim — a game for more than just trainspotters.

It might have been a given that *Microsoft Train Simulator* would appeal to the millions of train buffs and model-railroad hobbyists around the world, but I can assure you that it's an entertaining kick in the pants for any sim fan as well. Developed for Microsoft by UK-based Kuju Entertainment, *MS Train Sim* is one of the most compelling new titles to hit the simulation world in years.

USEFUL INFO

CATEGORY Simulation (E)
DEVELOPER Kuju Entertainment
PUBLISHER Microsoft
REQUIRED PII 266, 32MB RAM, 500MB HD, 4MB D3D card
WE RECOMMEND PIII 500, 64MB RAM, 1.8GB HD, 32MB 3D card
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 1

The game ships with six exhaustively detailed train routes on three separate continents, encompassing over 600 miles of real-world terrain and scenery. Modern routes include Amtrak's high-speed Washington-to-Philadelphia "bullet train," the BNSF Marias Pass freight line in the U.S., and Japan's Kyushu and Odakyu commuter lines. These are supplemented by some lovingly rendered re-creations of the fabled Flying Scotsman and Orient Express steam trains of the '20s and '30s.

You can haul heavy freight through the Rocky Mountains, jump behind the controls of the 125-mph Acela Express, or stoke up the firebox of a classic Golsdorf 2-10-0 steam engine and transport pampered pre-WWII travelers across the Austrian Alps. There's a whole world of locomotive gameplay in this box.

What's probably most amazing about *MS Train Sim* is its remarkably detailed scenery. Kuju employed satellite imagery to create all of the game's topographical surroundings, and the resulting backdrops are pure eye candy for anyone who loves to travel and experience new sights. Everything from Tokyo's bustling suburbs to the sleepy hamlets of England's Settle & Carlisle line has been reproduced with stunning detail and graphic fidelity.

The audio is equally impressive. The wall-pounding rumble of a 4,400-horsepower Dash-9 locomotive and the shrill blast of a steam locomotive's whistle are real enough to get you into serious trouble with your neighbors across the hall.



Whoa, is that *Unbreakable*? Derailments can be turned off, but that would take the fun out of the game.



The world-famous Flying Scotsman steam locomotive is one of the game's nine featured engines.



Montana's Marias Pass is one of the most scenic routes in American railroading.



Kick back, light up a cigar, and watch the scenery roll by from the Orient Express' piano-bar car.

The complex physics and mechanics of steam, diesel, and electric railroading have been replicated with a keen eye toward realism. Every gauge, valve, knob, and switch you would expect to find on a real engine has been accurately simulated on each of *Train Sim*'s nine featured locomotives. Real-world weather effects have been seamlessly integrated into the mix, along with a comprehensive set of tutorials and a bundled collection of freight and passenger "Activities" (basically skills tests followed up with post-run grading screens).

While *Train Sim* could certainly have benefited from a little more variety in its canned scenarios, the game's *Flight Simulator*–inspired open architecture does boast some very powerful editing tools to permit almost limitless third-party activity via locomotive and scenery add-ons. The conspicuous absence of any people on the train platforms (some lively vehicular and wildlife traffic offsets this to a degree) and the downright parsimonious decision to omit any sort of printed manual are two additional areas where the title could have been improved.

These are minor nitpicks in the grand scheme of things, however, because *Train Simulator* is such a wonderfully crafted ode to railroading that it's pretty easy to forgive its few shortcomings. Even if you aren't a serious trainspotter, you'll still find enough depth, substance, and sheer bloody mass in this entertaining and original new title to keep you riding the rails for months.

— Andy Mahood

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Real-world terrain; booming audio effects; convincing train physics; authentic locomotive controls.
LOWS: No printed manual; lack of activity variety; spooky lack of people.
BOTTOM LINE: A well-crafted and engaging new sim for all manner of gamers.

PC GAMER 87%
EXCELLENT

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Gangsters 2

It's an offer you could easily refuse, but RTS junkies might want to take it anyway.

Advertising claims notwithstanding, the original *Gangsters* was not the "godfather of gangster sims." Most people were overwhelmed by the strategy game's cluttered interface and gave up before they'd fully had a chance to explore all it had to offer.

Gangsters 2 won't draw everyone back to the fold, and it's definitely got some rough spots — but those who don't get bored or frustrated after the first few missions will likely find themselves returning for more mob action.

USEFUL INFO

CATEGORY Real-time strategy (T)
DEVELOPER Hothouse Creations
PUBLISHER Eidos
TESTED PII 266, 64MB RAM, 800MB HD
WE RECOMMEND PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 16MB video card
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 8

No one needs motivation to build a criminal empire, but *Gangsters 2* gives you one anyway. You play as one Joey Bane, whose mobster dad was snuffed by a rival gangster. Joey's a good guy — as the game opens he's just returned from serving in WWII, for cryin' out loud — and with each mission you learn that there were *a lot* of folks responsible for his daddy's demise.

For *Gangsters 2*, developer Hothouse Creations focused on designing a game that would allow for extensive control over the rackets, while providing you with more opportunity to immerse yourself in the drama unfolding onscreen. The turn-based gameplay of the original has been ditched for real-time action (though you can give orders while the game is paused), and the interface has been significantly streamlined (but it's still convoluted).



The fixed 800x600 resolution makes it difficult to play at the street-level view.



The bitmapped explosions won't psych you up, but seeing a team of enemy muscle go up in flames will!

Though each mission revolves around slightly different goals, the basic tenets remain: expand your territory, hire "muscle," open legal and illegal businesses, keep an eye on your cash flow, and kill the other guy.

There's no denying that the missions in *Gangsters 2* get a "samey" feeling rather quickly — about the only elements that change are the size of the maps and additional gangsters that allow you to bribe police or assassinate rivals. Gun battles are flat-out boring. Drive-by shootings offer your hitmen the most protection, but trying to control the vehicles is downright maddening: they'll continue to cruise up and down a street taking slugs from enemies even after you issue the "must do" command to return to a certain point. As individual gangsters accrue better weapons in their arsenal, you'll be irritated to discover you can't swap weapons between the various hoodlums — if your character has extra shotguns, why can't he give them to his lieutenants?

YOU TALKING TO ME?



Model yourself on the legendary Al Capone, who was nicknamed "Snorkey"! Born in Brooklyn, Capone was sent to jail in 1930 for carrying a concealed weapon in Philadelphia. Years later, in Alcatraz, he was sent to The Hole twice for talking. He died, in Florida, of syphilis dementia.

Gangsters 2's multiplayer features are a mixed bag. The GameSpy Arcade support is greatly appreciated, but the multiplayer game tosses out the territory-based action of the single-player campaign and instead hands each player a wad of cash to hire as many thugs as possible. Acquiring key territory — territory that allows you to hire more muscle — is one of the more interesting aspects of the single-player game, and its exclusion from the multiplayer game is odd.

The scripted missions in *Gangsters 2* will surely alienate many strategy gamers wanting flexibility in their empire building, and action fans expecting a gorefest will be bummed by the drab graphics and audio effects. Stick with this game, though, and you'll find yourself drawn back to it for reasons you really can't even pinpoint. It's no earth-shaker, but even at its worst, *Gangsters 2* is still an interesting and strangely compelling diversion.

— *Stephen Poole*



Nighttime is always the right time for a hit in real life, but in *Gangsters 2* it only makes it harder to see what the hell is going on.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Roaring Twenties crime: running rackets, recruiting gangsters, bribing police...
LOWS: Too-convoluted interface; dreadful vehicle control; multiplay omits solid single-play elements.
BOTTOM LINE: It probably holds more appeal for bookkeepers than would-be wiseguys.

PC GAMER 69%
ABOVE AVERAGE

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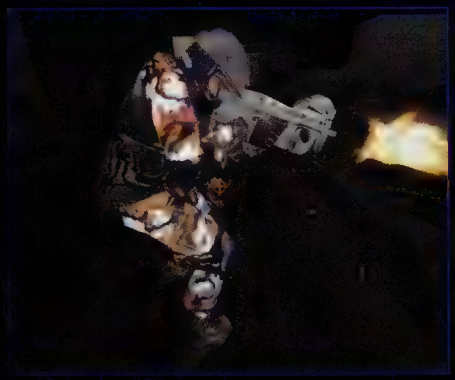
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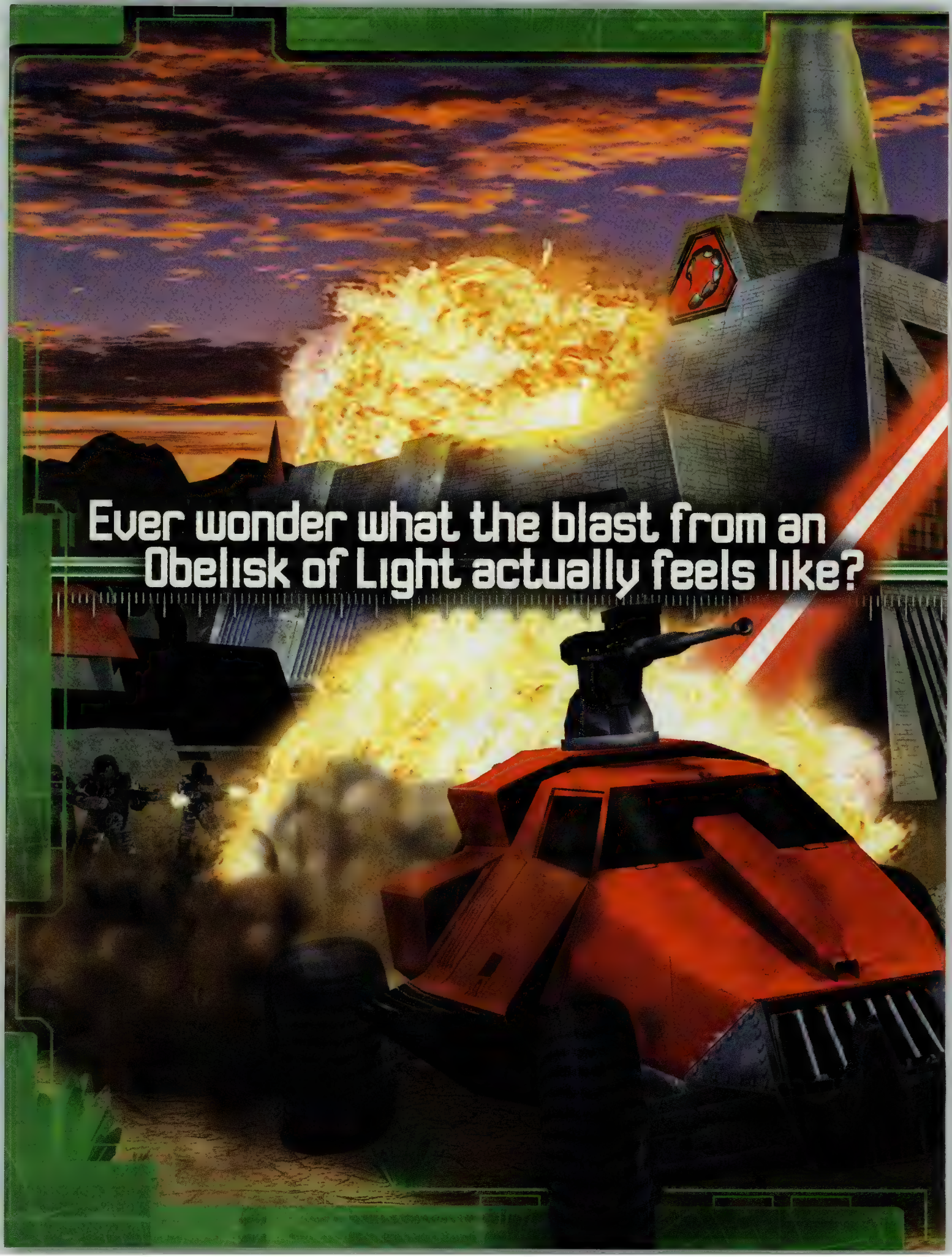
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World War II Online

Possibly the most ambitious online game ever finally ships — about a year too soon.

From the Internet's earliest days, wargamers have fantasized about creating huge "virtual battlefields" on which massive wars might be waged around the clock. But only in the last few years has such a concept become feasible.

It's hard to "review" developer Cornered Rat's shipping product — *WWII Online: Blitzkrieg* is far from a finished entity, though by its very nature, it probably never will be: It's a gigantic, evolving work-in-progress. What I *can* give you is one reviewer's initial impressions based on the game's first few weeks of public release.

USEFUL INFO

CATEGORY Simulation (T)

DEVELOPER Cornered Rat Software

PUBLISHER Strategy First

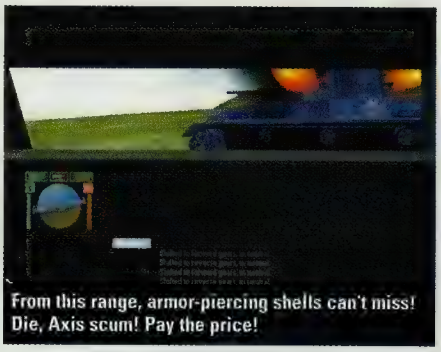
REQUIRED PII 400, 128MB RAM, 16MB 3D card, 56K modem

WE RECOMMEND All the RAM and bandwidth you can muster

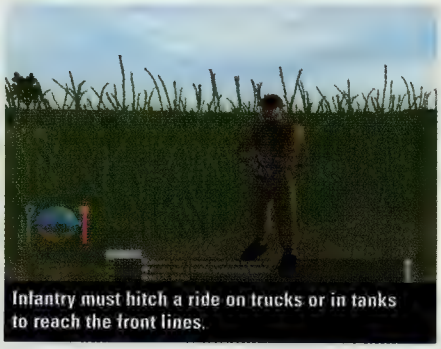
MAXIMUM PLAYERS Massively multiplayer

This huge, Internet-based, around-the-clock simulation allows you to fight as a tanker, a pilot, or a foot soldier — on either the Axis or the Allied side — during the 1940 blitzkrieg against France. You can create different personas on different sides and follow a career path through the ranks, you can log on casually for some quick bang-bang, or you can take part in more structured, cooperative, combined-arms operations.

The game world is persistent, and individual missions have a strategic impact on the overall campaign. Blitzkrieg is the only campaign currently playable, but eventually, Cornered Rat plans to simulate *every* major campaign of World War II, including naval action. That's some ambition.



From this range, armor-piercing shells can't miss! Die, Axis scum! Pay the price!



Infantry must hitch a ride on trucks or in tanks to reach the front lines.

Interest in this almost-too-good-to-be-true concept had grown enormously by the time the game officially debuted June 6 (the anniversary of D-Day). That release date made sense from a marketing viewpoint, but it was grossly premature and the developers certainly knew it. The deluge of new users overwhelmed the servers for days, and those who did manage to log on reported lots of problems.

A 70MB patch has allowed more players to get into the action, and it didn't take long before players started to *organize* their missions, mounting attacks and defenses keyed to the game's infrastructure of choke-points, bases, and factories. Before my eyes, the fighting blossomed into a front, and since then, gameplay in general has become incrementally more interesting. When everything *works*, it can be a blast.

I think the graphics are surprisingly good (most players don't), and I've had mostly acceptable frame rates (except when flying, at which point the game can become agonizingly choppy). Driving armored vehicles required lots of off-line practice, but it worked reasonably well in play, even though I could've easily done without the distracting "realism" of having to shift gears in the tanks, especially the German Mark III, which has a 10-speed transmission.

But as I write this, the game's been "live" for 16 days and it's still almost impossible to log on unless you do it at 10 a.m., when hardly anyone's playing. When the 9-to-5 people swamp the system, fuggeddaboutit. Other persistent problems include lag times in combat, especially when you change magnification on the gunners' sights (which leaves you helpless for four to five seconds); tanks that flip upside-down too easily; and a crappy little manual that omits critical information and contains no tutorials — a grave omission for a game so detailed and so intimidating to newbies.

Moreover, many battles seem grotesquely lop-sided. Everybody wants to fly a Stuka or drive a big, bad tank — you don't see many infantry, and *nobody* wants to drive a truck! Human nature being what it is, I don't see any quick fix for this syndrome.

Paying the $10-a-month fee means buying into the game's vast potential. Out of the box, this virtual battlefield is virtually unplayable. But for potential, *WWII Online* deserves a fair chance, so let's just call this a "provisional" review. We'll keep you informed as the game matures and settles down.

— William R. Trotter

ANOTHER LOOK



I'm completely torn between the infrequent moments of battlefield exhilaration and the mind-numbing tedium, frustration, and irritation. The designers have gone out of their way to make this sim as inaccessible as possible. Flying planes is hard, driving tanks is better, and using infantry is almost pointless. Online players are generally working well (no "l33t d00ds") and patches are helping, but this game's still nearly a year from finish.

—Rob Smith

This Ju87 was Rob's first confirmed kill. Too bad there's no confirmation of kills or tracking of stats.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Great concept; decent graphics; tons of room for player-initiated refinements.

LOWS: Horrendous access frustrations; annoying lag; pathetic manual.

BOTTOM LINE: Has tremendous potential, but doesn't really deliver on it yet.

PC GAMER 50%

MERELY OKAY

http://www.pcgamer.com

Legends of Might and Magic

It's not exactly a gem, but 3DO's newest is still worth plunking down a few gold for.

For those of you who remember early previews of *Legends of Might and Magic*, prepare to be disappointed. It's not the massively multiplayer, time-traveling adventure that was originally pitched, nor is it an RPG of any sort. The only things that have survived from the original design, in fact, are the character models and classes. Almost everything else was dropped when, at some late point in development, *Legends* became a team-based first-person shooter in the same vein as *Team Fortress*. No, we're not kidding.

USEFUL INFO

CATEGORY	Action/FPS (T)
DEVELOPER	New World Computing
PUBLISHER	3DO
REQUIRED	PII 300, 64MB RAM, 375MB HD, 16MB video card
WE RECOMMEND	PII 450, 128MB RAM
MAXIMUM PLAYERS	16

Upon first entering the game, you're asked to choose between the sides of Good and Evil and then select a character class. Each side has three different team-specific character classes, so the choice between Good and Evil does make a gameplay difference. The Good team has the paladin, druid, and sorceress, while the Evil force is made up of archers, warriors, and heretics. Each class is initially equipped with a unique melee and ranged weapon, and different weapons and armor options are available later on.

One of the best parts of *Legends of Might and Magic* is that, much as in *Deus Ex* multiplay, you get to build up your character over the course of the game. Each map has a different objective (rescue the princess, capture the sword, kill the dragon, kill the enemy leader), and completing these objectives gives you gold with which to buy new armor and weapons. You can also get gold by killing the random monsters (liches, giant spiders, and the rest of the medieval rogues' gallery) that populate the map.

Once you've built up a stash of money, it's time to shop. At the beginning of each round you can simply pull up a new menu and decide how you want to outfit your avatar. You can hold only one new weapon at a time, however, and if you're killed, anyone can take it. This forces you to be cautious. If you've spent five rounds saving for that Gatling crossbow and you're down to a sliver of health, perhaps you're not going to charge into the princess' keep.

To heighten the tension, there are no health power-ups in the game, and when you die you're forced to stay in ghost mode — merely watching the action until the round is over. This is the perfect time, however, to scout out the maps and take notes on the excellent level design. You can sneak through sewers, scuttle over rooftops, and even fire each other out of catapults for sneak attacks.

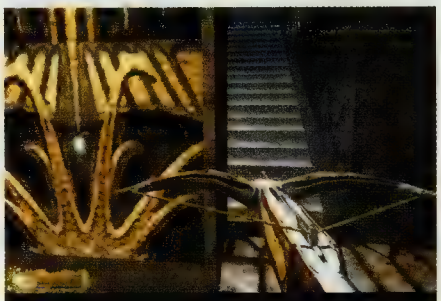
All of this is made possible, and actually enjoyable, through some surprisingly fast and stable online code. While there's an unsatisfying option to practice off-line by yourself, the main game is online-only, and developer New World Computing has wrestled some great performance out of the LithTech engine.

Lag is a minimal concern; aiming, jumping, and crouching are easy and intuitive; and there isn't a crash bug in sight. Graphically, much of the game is as ugly as a goblin's mug, but solid code, interesting options, and a couple of unique twists make *Legends* worth noticing in a genre of giants.

— Daniel Erickson



One paladin vs. one dragon. Three seconds later there was only a blackened pair of plate-mail boots.


Castle levels are often filled with secret passages that let you sneak up on unsuspecting foes.


The mix of enemy forces and NPC monsters can be overwhelming at first. Pick your battles carefully.


Who says elves and faeries can't throw down?

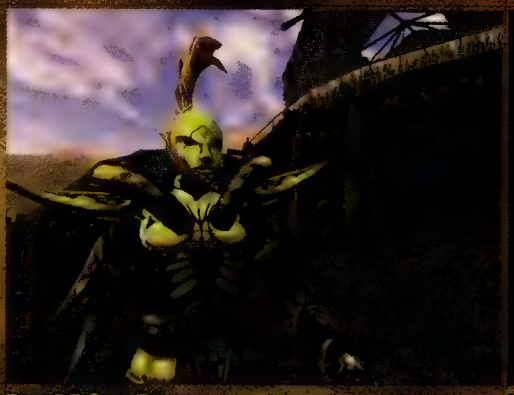
FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Unique level design; character building is fun; well-balanced sides.

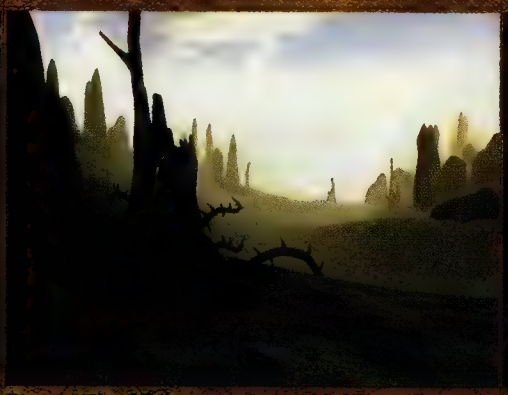
LOWS: Character models poorly designed; user interface is awkward; no tutorial.

BOTTOM LINE: Fantasy meets fragging in a solid, if not brilliant, online game.

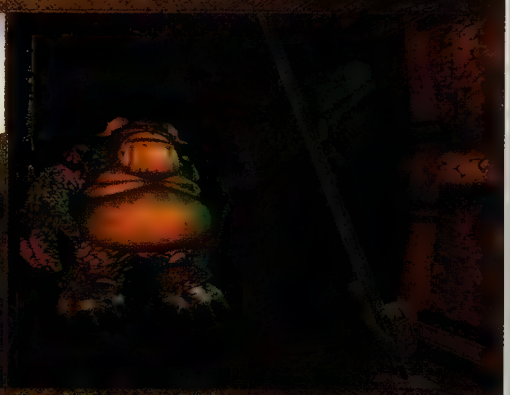
PC GAMER 79% GOOD



Best RPG of E3
Computer Gaming World



Best of E3 - RPG
Game Revolution



Top 20 Games of E3
GameSpot

* *The sequel to Arena and Daggerfall,* the award-winning 1994 and 1996 RPGs of the Year.

* *Live another life.* Play any character you can imagine, from the heroic warrior to the secret assassin.

* *Explore another world.* The enormous game world is open and free for you to discover. Go anywhere you want and do anything you want.

* *Next Generation Technology.* Realistic textures and objects, incredible polygon counts, and advanced weather systems truly take you to another world.

* *Choose your friends.* Involve yourself in guild politics and a huge variety of quests. Thousands of characters remember you and your actions.

* *Download new adventures.* Included with the PC version is "The Elder Scrolls Construction Set". Create, share, and download new characters, dungeons, quests and more.



Bethesda SOFTWORKS INC.
a ZeniMax Media Company

PC CD ROM

XBOX

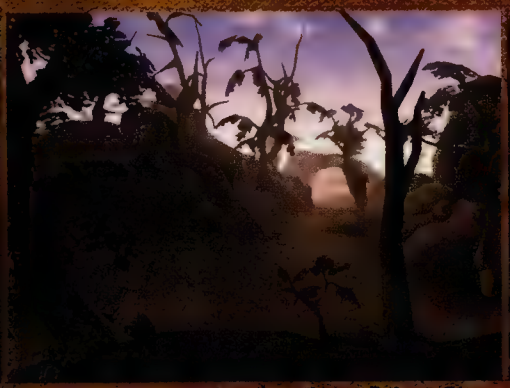
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org or call 1-800-771-3772 for more info.

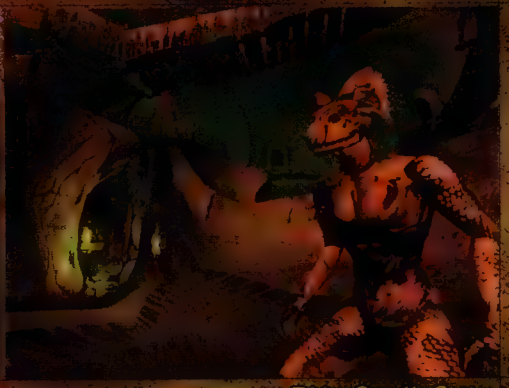
All screenshots from PC version.



#1 Xbox Game of E3
-Gamesmania



Finalist, Best RPG of Show
-Official E3 Awards



Elder Scrolls Series
-GameSpy Hall of Fame



The Elder Scrolls III

MORROWIND™

www.elderscrolls.com

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Who Wants to Be a Millionaire 3rd Edition

Now you can download new questions instead of shelling out for the same old game over and over again.

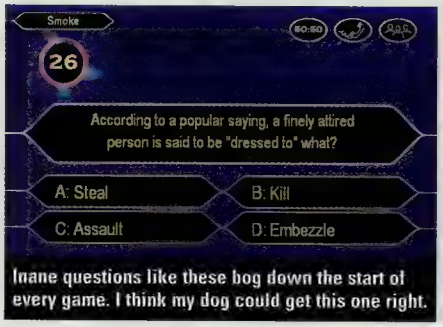
You can blame one show for the current deluge of obnoxious "reality" game shows — *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. That success has carried over into the interactive-entertainment field, too, with the original *Millionaire* game and its hellspawn riding high atop the sales charts for the last year. So, who can blame Buena Vista for milking this cash cow's udder raw with the *3rd Edition*?

USEFUL INFO

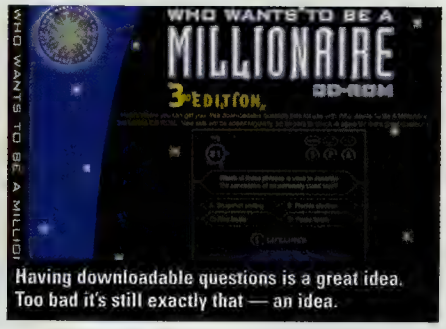
CATEGORY Trivia (E)
DEVELOPER Valleycrest Prod.
PUBLISHER Buena Vista Inter.
REQUIRED P200, 32MB RAM, 200MB HD
WE RECOMMEND 64MB RAM
MAXIMUM PLAYERS 1

The media giant must have felt a small pang of guilt, though. Why else would it be so generous as to offer downloadable questions from its website (*www.bvinteractive.com*) to supplement the supply, as opposed to the time-tested formula of making you buy a new game with each revision, with the only change *being* those additional questions?

A quick download of the new "content" provided the answer rather painfully. At press time, about three weeks after the game's retail release, only one set of new questions was available, called Phrase Craze. It consists of one — that's right, one — set of 15 questions based on well-known sayings. The really annoying thing about it is that if you get a question wrong and want to try again, you have to sit through the same questions in basically the same order every time until you get to the one you missed.



Inane questions like these bog down the start of every game. I think my dog could get this one right.



Having downloadable questions is a great idea. Too bad it's still exactly that — an idea.

Unless a decent number of extra question sets is available by the time you read this review, this new feature is pretty much a slap in the face to the series' loyal customers.

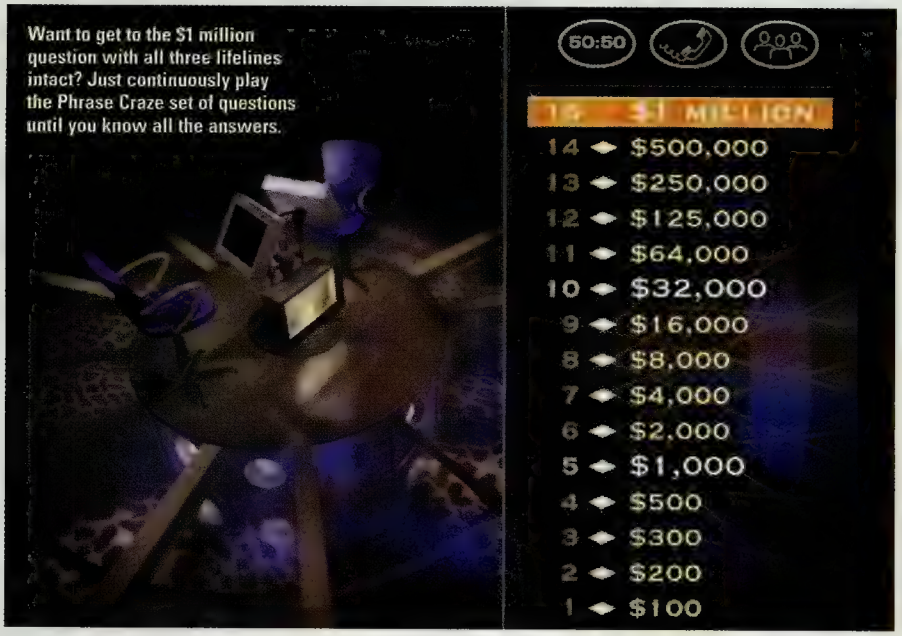
The regular version of the game is a carbon copy of every version that's come before. Regis — for better or worse — drones on about what plateau you've reached and makes a pitiful attempt of adding drama to the proceedings by pausing before telling you if you got the right answer. The difficulty of the 600-plus new questions is decently associated with the amount of money you're playing for, but it sure would be nice if you could skip the first few questions of each game, which seem to have been written for pre-kindergartners.


I certainly don't want to be what this screen suggests. Of course, your mileage may vary.

I did find an annoying glitch in the game, though it happened only once while I was asking for a Phone Call lifeline. As Regis dialed up his extremely annoying friend (in the real show, you get to call your own supposedly smart buddy), they started to chitchat about some nonsense or other. Unfortunately, the clock — which gave me 30 seconds to choose my answer — never stopped running! Ten seconds into their conversation, the clock ran out and Regis informed me that I had lost...at least, he said, I didn't make a fool of myself by choosing the wrong answer. Thanks, Rege — you're a real pal.

If you're a *Millionaire* freak, you'll probably be satisfied with the new questions and not care about the total lack of additions *3rd Edition* offers. After all the money made off these games, though, it would've been nice to see the fans rewarded with a little something extra.

— Rob Smolka



FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: New questions are solid; follows the tried-and-true game-show format.

LOWS: The highly touted ability to download new questions is a joke: right now there's only one set.

BOTTOM LINE: Series devotees will enjoy the new questions, but this edition won't win any converts.

PC GAMER 55%
MERELY OKAY

Brought to you by the makers of PC GAMER

XBOX™

Official Xbox Magazine



EXCLUSIVE!

HALO

Seeing is believing

- Astounding new vehicles
- Devastating new weapons
- Breathtaking new screenshots

PLUS!

Air Force Delta Storm
New Xbox controllers
How to get out of a well (using only an Xbox)
Xbox Game Disc
An ultra-sexy Q&A
and
Sea Monkeys!

imagine MEDIA WITH PASSION

XBOX GAME DISC

INSIDE EVERY ISSUE!
(except this one)

A console and a magazine for the new millennium

Contents

XBOX™
Official Xbox Magazine

WHAT'S THIS September 2001 mini-magazine

OFFICIAL IN ALL THE RIGHT PLACES



This is the part of our little mini-magazine where I'm supposed to personally greet you (so you'll feel comfortable and trust me) and utilize the power of prose to sway you into believing exactly what I want you to believe – it's like selling you a car, only without the optional undercoat. But I think that you're probably way too smart for that and would see right through my blatant sales pitch.

Instead of hiding behind feel-good phrases, though, I'm going to give it to you straight. Here is a breakdown of what my Editor's Letter might have been (if it had been what it usually is – which it isn't).

WHAT I'D WRITE: We are the only magazine with an Xbox Game Disc and the only place you can play amazing, exclusive Xbox games for free.
Evil intention: If you own an Xbox, you *have* to buy this magazine. Muhahahaha.
End result: You buy our first issue because you have to – but then sign up for a lifetime subscription because you fall deeply, madly in love with the magazine.

WHAT I'D WRITE: We're Official, which means we have unrivaled access to the Xbox, the games, and the people behind the games.
Evil intention: I want to convince you that the other magazines are poor imitations and that all of your money belongs to us.
End result: Magazine monogamy. You won't have to stray because we'll satisfy you on every single level.

WHAT I'D WRITE: We're 100% independent, and we won't pull any punches when it comes to reviewing games or covering the Xbox. We even have carte blanche to call Bill Gates names.
Evil intention: To show that you can have your cake and eat it too. With frosting!
End result: Our honesty will inspire your devotion, love, and possibly expensive electronic gifts sent directly to the editors.

WHAT I'D WRITE: **Official Xbox Magazine** will serve as the ultimate guide to Xbox gaming.
Evil intention: To make you feel stupid for not buying our magazine. After all, what kind of dolt wouldn't want the "ultimate" guide?
End result: We'll arm you with knowledge that will impress your friends, woo the ladies (or fellas), and possibly lead to the lavish lifestyle normally enjoyed by wealthy gadabouts and international millionaire playboys.

WHAT I'D WRITE: The magazine will entertain and inform you on every page. The irreverent tone of voice, creative stories, and stunning design will gel together to form a magazine so amazing and so powerful that it'll likely bring people to tears.
Evil intention: To make you cry.
End result: You'll find out that crying doesn't make you weak at all – in fact, it'll make you look sensitive, like Matt Damon, only less annoying.

Then I'd wrap it all up with a snappy conclusion that would excite you about the magazine, the Xbox, and life in general. Enjoy and feel free to contact me with any suggestions (and be sure to include your evil intentions).

— Mike Salmon, Editor in Chief



MAG SCENE: The word *magazine* comes from an ancient Arabic word for "hoard," which is appropriate, because this mag is a treasure trove.

CONTENTS

Your quintessential guide... umm... to the guide to the world of Xbox

PURE GENIUS!



EDITOR'S LETTER 02

It's that bit over there to the left – read it if you get a second, would ya?

FIRST LOOK



AIR FORCE DELTA STORM 04

Big, exclusive screenshots. Big, exploding planes. What else do you want?

BIZARRE



NEWS 06

What *can't* your Xbox be used for? A look at the peripherals – and the peripheral uses – for your next console.

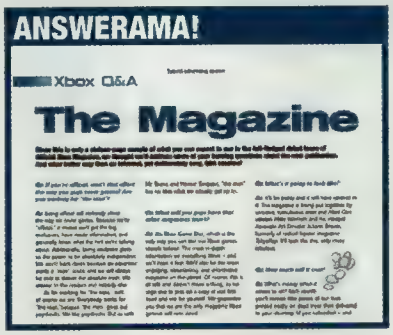
HEAVENLY!

PREVIEWS 08

HALO

Nothing to see here, folks, please move along. We certainly don't unveil two completely new and amazing levels of what could be the best-looking videogame ever made. Nope, not here.

ANSWERAMA!



Q & A 12

Still trying to figure out why there is a beautifully designed, brilliantly written mini-magazine dealing with *console gaming* right smack-dab in the middle of your beloved *PC Gamer*? Check out these pages to get the inside scoop on what the hell this is all about and why you should care.

PLAY ME!



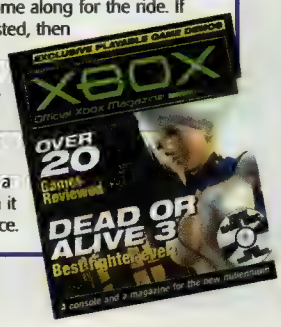
THE DISC 14

We're not *just* a magazine (although there are worse things than magazines – Olestra, *Showgirls*, and O-Town spring to mind). Our disc full of playable games and cool extras delivers all you'll ever need to enjoy your Xbox.

THE END

SUBSCRIBE ALREADY 16

Our final page is devoted to giving you the opportunity to come along for the ride. If you're not interested, then all you have to do is stupidly ignore this whole thing – we won't take it personally if you don't have the brains to see a good thing when it hits you in the face.



MISSING CONTENT

Here's a few of the things we'd likely get into a full-sized issue. Maybe.

- **Exclusive looks at games so top-secret that even Bill Gates doesn't know about them**
- **Use your Xbox to win the lottery**
- **Free money: We're just giving it away!**
- **J-Lo versus *Halo*: Will Puff Daddy make the right choice?**
- **How to use your PS2 as an ashtray**
- **Achieving world peace one violent game at a time**
- **That thing you really wanted to read about – written just the way you like**

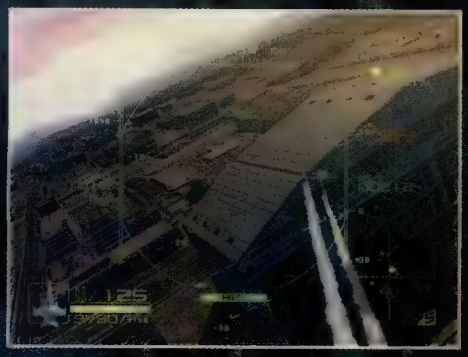
■ **A MATTER OF SOME GRAVITY:** If, for some reason, the ring-world featured in *Halo* were to stop spinning, everything on the surface would fly off and it would be torn apart.

The look and feel of the game is far from the typical blandness of a flight sim – eschewing rolling hills in favor of big, dangerous-looking installations.

Magic Missiles



The missions are fairly simple, yet densely packed with objectives to keep things moving along...



...which may include assaults on ground targets, requiring perfect aim...



...or simply locking on and letting loose some heat seekers.

STICKY FINGERS: Xbox flight fans can relax – a convincing flight stick is in development even as we speak.

EXCLUSIVE

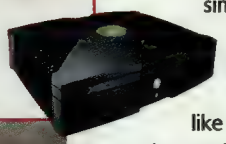
Air Force Delta Storm

DEVELOPER: Konami , PUBLISHER: Konami , RELEASE DATE: Launch

Grittier than *Jag*, faster than *Top Gun*, and less crap than *Iron Eagle*.

Only on Xbox

The whole game is, at this point, an Xbox exclusive. Delicious.



PITCH IT

Konami obviously has bigger fish to fry – big, Metal, Solid fish, if you will – but *Air Force Delta* on Dreamcast has a big following, and flight-sim and shooter fans should be equally attracted to this *Ace Combat*-killer.

WIRED

Get a Japanese-capable browser and check out the wacky shenanigans, weird sub-businesses, and general malarkey at Konami's fascinating Japanese site at www.konami.co.jp.

First things first: This is not a simulation in the videogame sense of that word. Sure, the game "simulates" the experience of piloting a fighter jet in a series of ever-more complicated missions, and features some pretty realistic aircraft physics, but the realism has been toned down to suit both the Xbox controller and the console gamer's expectations. *Air Force Delta Storm* is about action first, and realism second.

At first glance, however, you could be forgiven for thinking you were watching the real thing. The graphics on this, the first Xbox flight-combat game, put every high-end PC sim to shame. Dreamily-rendered aircraft, detailed landscapes, and wonderfully convincing cloud effects make some moments look more like a movie than a game – especially in replay mode.

A selection of 50 missions and more than 40 aircraft means that you won't be seeing everything *Air Force Delta Storm* has to offer for quite some time. And the variety of missions is impressive – far better than that seen on the 1999 Dreamcast game, with a nice mix of tactical, strike, and combat scenarios to weave through. A typical mission could be anything from a one-on-one dogfight in an F-14 to a ground-strafing, terrain-hugging, tank-smashing mission in an A-10 Thunderbolt.

Especially impressive is the wealth of design that has gone into both locations and scenarios. While *Ace Combat* has bland, almost generic locales, *Air Force Delta*'s look like *fun* places. This brutal, frenetic mixture of sim-sensibilities and arcade aesthetics looks like it'll have wings come launch-time, and the more we see of it, the more impressed we are. Inside word has it that the Xbox game was simplicity itself to develop, which bodes well for the "solid" quality we can expect from Konami in the future. XBOX

WHAT'S IN STORE

Don't believe us when we tell you how amazing this game looks? Well, why don't you judge for yourself. We're currently hard at work bribing... err... *convincing* Konami to get us a playable demo of *Air Force Delta Storm* for our second issue.

■ **X-PLANES:** NASA's current secret aviation projects are rumored to include a plane that can travel faster than Mach 10. Which is approximately "a lot" faster than a Vespa.

News

News, notes, columns, and the kitchen sink

Battling for control

Game makers aren't the only ones vying for a piece of the Xbox pie



No period in a console's life is more important to third-party developers and hardware manufacturers than the critical launch period. Game publishers, for instance, strive to bring their titles to market during the first few months of a console because it's the best time to make a splash in the market. Recently, EA created an instant franchise with *SSX* by releasing the game before the PS2 market was flooded with competing snowboarding games.

Third-party hardware manufacturers face a similar battle for market share. And considering the fact that console makers are notoriously bad at meeting demand for peripherals at launch (in the case of the PS2 launch, Sony came up short on everything), third-party hardware manufacturers know that this is the time to carve out their own portion of market share on the Xbox. Plus, as always seems to happen during the pre-launch phase of a console, some gamers are complaining about the Xbox controller – sight unseen. While the grumbling will certainly die down after the public gets its hands on final hardware, it still makes the launch period a crucial time for third-party hardware developers.

Here are the main contenders

InterAct PowerPad



InterAct's PowerPad is very similar to Microsoft's own controller. In fact, the PowerPad shares the best attributes of the Xbox Game Controller, including a 10-foot cable, rumble support, and eight analog buttons. Unlike the official controller, however, the PowerPad comes in three translucent colors: black, blue, and green.

Other Peripherals:

ShadowBlade Arcade Stick
This shiny control stick brings the feel of the arcade home. It works especially well with fighting games, thanks to its programmable combo buttons.

Rumble Stick
This flight stick features rumble support, a twist handle, and fully programmable buttons. Should go perfectly with Konami's *Air Force Delta Storm*.

Thrustmaster Upad



Thrustmaster's first entry into the Xbox peripheral market is certainly one of the most unique third-party control pads currently in development. Named after its peculiar "U" shape, this controller may be the most drastic alternative for all those who complain that the Xbox controller "doesn't feel right."

Other Peripherals:

FreeStyler Board
Compatible with skateboarding and snowboarding games, this peripheral makes games feel more like real life – without all the nasty spleen injuries.

NASCAR Racing Wheel
Although steering wheels for NASCAR games really only need to turn left, this wheel offers left *and* right turning directions – plus foot pedals and programmable buttons.

■ **OPTICAL OUT:** Got Dolby? The S-Video AV pack also includes Optical Digital Out – simple, elegant, and cool.

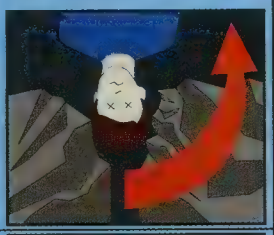
How to escape from a well

...using only an Xbox – and 33 feet of climbing rope

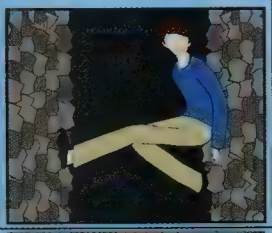
Did you know that more people were injured last year from falling into wells than were injured in rogue circus-elephant attacks? Thankfully, the Xbox is the perfect solution to this rampant problem. It's not just the world's most powerful videogame console – it may also be the tool that saves your life.

Stay tuned to the **Official Xbox Magazine** for more survival uses for the Xbox. Until then, here's what to do if you find yourself stuck in a well with nothing but an Xbox and 33 foot of climbing rope.

Step One:
Get your bearings. **The bottom of a well can be dark and confusing. First of all, determine which direction is "up." Generally, it is the direction you just came from.**

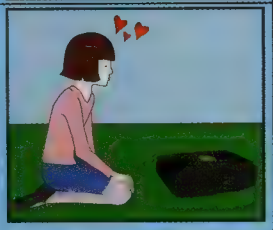


Step Two:
Slowly climb in the "up" direction. **Form your body in an "L" shape with your back flat against one wall. Take small "steps" up the wall with your hands and feet. Don't forget the Xbox and rope.**



Step Three:
Toss the Xbox outside the well. **Make sure you're near the top of the well – and remember to hold onto the power cable or controller as you throw the Xbox.**

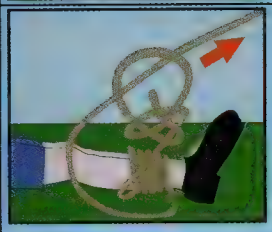




Step Four:
Wait until others approach. **Children and college students love two things most of all: hanging out near wells, and playing with new videogame consoles. Before long, someone will come by and try to take your Xbox home.**



Step Five:
Tie cord around body. **New Xbox owners develop a strong attachments to their console. Even the smallest child will be able to drag you out of the well.** **WARNING: DO NOT LOOP CORD AROUND NECK.**



Step Six:
Escape. **Use the 33-foot climbing rope to subdue and immobilize your rescuer so that you can escape with your Xbox.**

Control Freaks

People are always trying to revolutionize the way you control games. Here, we look at the absolute weirdest peripherals ever created.

Powerglove (Nintendo NES)
The idea: Controlling games with the clench of a fist – the kids will go crazy for this one.
But they didn't count on: ...Very few teenage boys in the Eighties had a spare fist. Besides, it even *knew* it was uncontrollable and so featured a full joypad on the forearm.

R.O.B the Robot (Nintendo NES)
The idea: It's a pet. It's a cybernetic buddy. It's the ultimate peripheral.
But they didn't count on: ...All it could do was pick things up, swing around on its plastic hips, and drop things – like an old man buying chicken at a supermarket. And only two games ever took advantage of it – the desperately bad *Gyromite*, and another game so bad we forgot what it is.



Your robot buddy R.O.B.

32X/Sega CD
The idea: You can plug anything into your Genesis. Including a separate console.
But they didn't count on: ...If you stacked all the ill-fated Genesis peripherals (the 32X, the Mega CD, the Activator, a Game Shark, etc.), you could not only cause a rolling blackout, but you'd realize primitive man's dream of building a ladder to the moon.

TV Tuner (Game Gear)
The idea: Game Gear games are blurry and unplayable, so you may as well use the thing for something useful.
But they didn't count on: ...at the time, all there was on TV was *Diff'rent Strokes*, *Who's the Boss*, and very early episodes of *Saved by the Bell*. Good stuff like Fox's *When Cars Attack* and *World's Scariest Open Sores* hadn't even been invented yet.

MadCatz — Advanced Control Pad Pro



MadCatz's entry into the Xbox controller arena is the most rugged-looking of the bunch and perhaps the most versatile. It has all the features we'd expect from an Xbox game controller with the addition of macros that enable players to program combos, special commands, and other goodies onto a single button.

Other Peripherals:

Light Gun
Although there aren't any light-gun games due for the Xbox, when they do get here, this gun will be ready. Until then, don't point it at people. It's impolite.

Panther X
The Panther X has been around for years on the PC market, so it seems natural that it would show up on the Xbox.

Gamester — Vortex Controller



The sleekest controller of the bunch is Gamester's [Radica's console hardware group] Vortex Controller. The key feature that stands out on this polished steel control pad is its unique indented digital pad. After a few hundred rounds of *Dead or Alive 3*, your thumbs may thank you.

Other Peripherals:

Pro Racer Hand Held Wheel
Gamester certainly isn't playing by the rules when it comes to controller design. Judging by the look of the steering-column-less Pro Racer Hand Held Wheel, this company is into trying new things. The steering mechanism works as follows: the right side of the Pro Racer is locked in place while the left half moves a full 50 degrees in either direction.

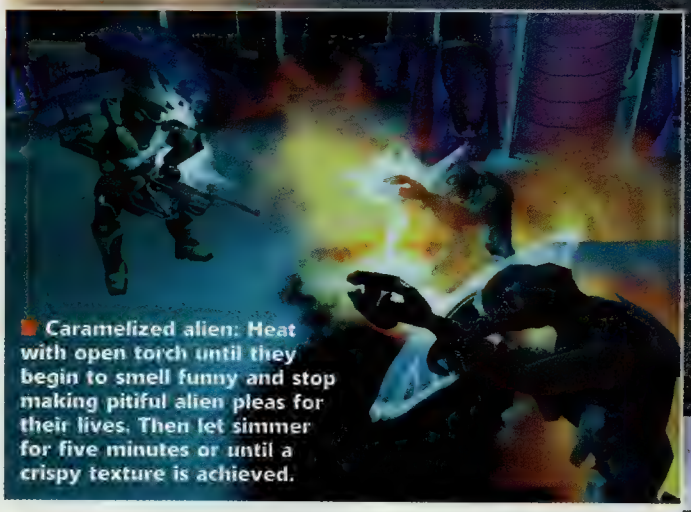
EDITOR'S NOTE: Although we make light of the it, falling into wells is no joke. Millions die every year from well-plummeting injuries. If you should come across a well, call the fire department or fill it with dirt.

After seeing Halo, the real world looks ugly

Halo

Microsoft's declared intention is to blur genre boundaries with its Xbox portfolio and promote every title in its own right. While it would be ridiculous to argue that *Halo* does not largely conform to the first-person shooter genre, it does have plenty of other strings to its bow. Third-person elements, the control of mounted weapons, seamless transition between the great outdoors and the subterranean depths of complex bases, and the ability to pilot a variety of vehicles all punch satisfying holes in the confining walls of accepted shoot-'em-up rules.

Halo may need little introduction to anyone who has an interest in PC games. Originally announced for that platform nearly two years ago, *Halo* will now shine first on Xbox. It's no exaggeration to say that Bungie's *Halo* was already one of the most hotly anticipated shooters in the market well before Microsoft absorbed Bungie into its Seattle headquarters, and it's difficult to imagine a bigger or better launch title for shooter fans. No pier-end, knuckle-ugly bantamweight, *Halo* is shaping up to be a real prizefighter: to say that PC owners are a little bit jealous is like saying that outer space is a little bit big.



Caramelized alien: Heat with open torch until they begin to smell funny and stop making pitiful alien pleas for their lives. Then let simmer for five minutes or until a crispy texture is achieved.

And of course space is far more than a little bit big. However, in *Halo*, it isn't big enough to keep humans from running into a wide variety of hostile alien races. At the tail end of an intergalactic war, the cybernetically enhanced Marine warrior that you play in the game is pursued across the cold heavens to crash-land on an artificial ring-world, or Halo. Imagine the flat rim of a spokeless wheel. Imagine that it's 10,000 km in diameter and floating in space. Imagine living on the inside plane of that wheel in a terraformed, multi-climatic landscape of seas, beaches, mountain ranges, forests, and plains, with high-tech military bases worming deep into the artificial crust. This ring is Halo, and it's here that you and a desperate army of scattered Marines must make a stand against the alien horde, discovering the secrets of this world as you fight to survive, using proprietary – as well as captured – weaponry, technology, and vehicles.

Bungie has now got the enemies to a stage where they

TRACK RECORD

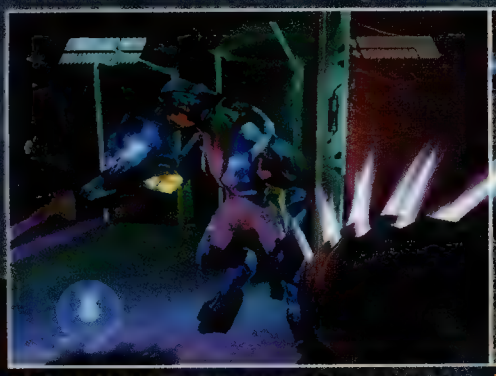
DEVELOPER: Bungie PUBLISHER: Microsoft RELEASE DATE: Launch

ALSO WORKING ON: Rumored to be working on a Xbox-only title based on the *Halo* engine that involves castles and catapults – but you didn't hear that from us.

WHO ARE THEY?: A basement shop that's made it to the big time. Their decade of work spans from Mac shooter *Marathon* to games on next-gen consoles such as *Oni* and *Halo*.

GAME:	SYSTEM:	SCORE:
***Myth* series**	**PC/Mac**	7/10
Oni	**PC/Mac/ PS2**	8/10
AVERAGE:		7.5

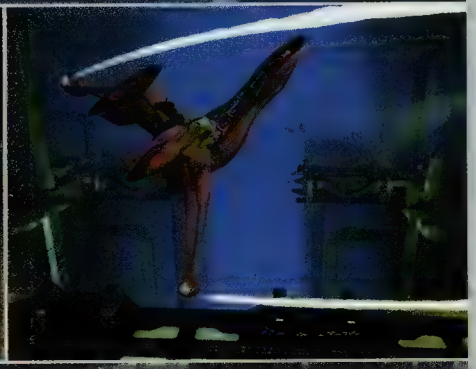
EFFRONTERY: In one of the lain M. Banks sci-fi novels that inspired *Halo*, a warlike alien race discovers that humans refer to them as "The Affront." They love it and adopt the name officially.



See a cool weapon on an alien and wish you had one yourself? No problem, just figure out a way to kill 'em and the weapon is yours.



Back-seat drivers are actually welcome in *Halo*, since they provide much needed cover fire as you careen through levels.



Bored by the dull human vehicles? *Halo* lets you "borrow" some alien craft.

In Detail: The power of Xbox



This is a brand-new vehicle, the human tank. Six Marines can hop on this massive tank – it features a giant turret controlled by the driver and a manned chain gun for that extra firing power.



■ It's okay for children to mercilessly kill aliens, Nazis, and boy bands because they are bad.

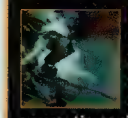
Gunning for glory

On a recent trip to Xbox HQ, we got an opportunity to play a couple of amazing new levels and rip-through alien enemies with the (as-of-now) complete *Halo* arsenal. To wit:

SNIPER RIFLE: Alien heads were popping with the precision of the multiple levels of zoom sniper rifle.



ROCKET LAUNCHER: Loads two rockets at once and animates beautifully as you clear entire rooms with the massive, fiery explosion.



FLAMETHROWER: Possibly the most impressive (and outright fun) weapon, we spent some time deep-frying aliens with this tasty (or should we say toasty) weapon.



NEEDLER: This alien weapon (which you can lift off the bodies of dearly departed alien freaks) fires multiple charges that track down the target and explode in its body for a satisfying, stunning kill.

ASSAULT RIFLE: This is the standard weapon of all standard weapons. It has a real-time ammo display, a built-in flashlight, and you can even use the butt of the rifle on heads of enemies up close.

Filling out the armory for *Halo* are the fuel rod gun, a gravity rifle, and the trusty shotgun.

react to sound and light. They are also seeking cover if they see you doing so first, searching in packs, retreating in squad formations, and focussing searches intelligently. When an alien is killed, the AI decides whether it will drop its weapon for you to pick up or go into a gripping death spasm and loose off dangerously random volleys of ordnance. An ultra-realistic animation system (inverse kinematics, which allows body models to react to impact) should make these scenes morbidly convincing.

AI also plays an important part with your fellow Marines. In the single-player game, you will encounter plenty of soldiers who will help you out using cooperative AI. The best example yet demonstrated concerns the buggy, which has a rear-mounted high-caliber machine gun. While you drive, an AI Marine can operate the turret and give great protection from any aliens encountered en route. The single-player missions will also be playable in multiplayer cooperative mode – an exciting promise indeed. In four-way split-screen set-up, you can play with friends as a Marine squad, all riding in vehicles (including tanks and drop-ships) with one driving, others riding shotgun, and one using a mounted gun. You can even play 16-players over an Xbox LAN network as shown at this year's E3. There will also be more standard deathmatch and capture-the-flag games along with a rumored multiplayer racing game.



Halo is as ambitious as it is intelligent and beautiful. It has the potential to be the best shooter ever made for any platform, but happily for us, it's chosen to touch down on Xbox. There's no better reason to strap yourself in and count down to launch.

— Nathan Jones

■ **THE MILKY WAY SUCKS:** Did you know that our very own galaxy has a supermassive black hole at its center? Scientists now suspect that most spiral galaxies revolve around these cosmic downers.

GAME POTENTIAL

LOOKS GOOD
■ Deformable terrain – create real craters ■ Real physics – hit a tree, and get thrown through the windshield ■ Active camouflage – *Predator*-style semi-invisibility ■ Umbra effect – sun shines realistically through leaves and branches ■ Minute detail – spot, if you can, the names and firing-pin dents on shell casings

ODDS ARE...
Halo will be literally out of this world.

NEEDS WORK
■ Adjustable turning speed on vehicles – presently set very slow ■ Full AI implementation is needed – it's already impressive, but we want more. ■ The game – every time we see *Halo* it looks better: now we want to start seeing more gameplay ■ Umm, that's all we can think of.

WANT MORE?
Tune in to our first issue (on sale September 25) and get a full hands-on report on *Halo* and 11 other Xbox launch titles.

FINAL THOUGHTS
Although there's still a lot to be polished in *Halo*, the fundamental structure is impressively solid and the visual skin absolutely kissable. After your first encounter with the game, you can't help wanting to return for a good long snog.



■ Just another day at the office for a cybernetic Marine on a planet full of aliens. Ho hum.

Freeze-frame

LEVEL: 3 HOURS IN: 3.5

OBJECTIVE: Rescue a captain from alien clutches

As we join the game, you've just come around a quiet corner and been ambushed by a pack of aliens.



1 You are here – and in a boatload of trouble. At this point you need to find cover behind some rocks and fast.

2 Thankfully, these little aliens tend to congregate in packs – perfect for a grenade or rocket launcher. Toss a grenade into the crowd, watch 'em hopelessly dive for cover, and then blow it all sky high.

3 The manned (err... aliened) alien turret is deadly and accurate. After finding cover, you should zoom in and take out the alien in the turret. Beware: other aliens will jump in the turret if you give them a chance.

The Magazine

Since this is only a sixteen-page sample of what you can expect to see in the full-fledged debut issue of Official Xbox Magazine, we thought we'd address some of your burning questions about the new publication. And what better way than an informal, yet deliberately sexy, Q&A session?

Q: If you're official, won't that affect the way you guys cover games? Are you working for "the man"?

A: Being official will *definitely* affect the way we cover games. Because we're "official," it means we'll get the big exclusives, have inside information, and generally know what the hell we're talking about. Additionally, being official gives us the power to be absolutely independent. We won't back down because an advertiser wants a "nicer" score, and we will always be able to deliver the absolute truth. We answer to the readers and nobody else.

As for working for "the man," well, of course we are. Everybody works for "the man," because "the man" gives out paychecks. We like paychecks. But as with Mr. Burns and Homer Simpson, "the man" has no idea what we actually get up to...

Q: What will you guys have that other magazines won't?

A: An Xbox Game Disc, which is the only way you can test out Xbox games (details below). The most in-depth information on everything Xbox – and we'll have it first. We'll also be the most engaging, entertaining, and informative magazine on the planet. Of course, this is all talk and doesn't mean a thing, so we urge you to pick up a copy of our first issue and see for yourself. We guarantee you that we are the only magazine Xbox gamers will ever need.

Q: What's it going to look like?

A: It'll be pretty and it will have content in it. The magazine is being put together by sensitive, tumultuous artist and *Next Gen* veteran Mike Wilmoth and his intrepid Associate Art Director Juliann Brown, formerly of radical hipster magazine *TokyoPop*. It'll look like this, only more fabulous.



Q: How much will it cost?

A: What's money when it comes to art? Each month you'll receive little pieces of our lives printed neatly on dead trees then delivered to your doorstep (if you subscribe) – and

The Xbox Game Disc

Q: What do I get on my Official Xbox Magazine Game Disc?

A: The first **Official Xbox Magazine** disc will contain a DVD, which means you can play it on any DVD player, including that soon-to-be-replaced PlayStation2. Want to see Xbox games in beautiful full-screen crystal-clear motion? Be prepared to hit the floor when you view our trailers and peruse our slickly styled interface. It's just the thing to get you excited about Xbox leading up to launch.



So you think that sounds good? Well, our second issue will come with an Xbox Game Disc and will be loaded up with playable demos, preview trailers, and a ton of very cool surprises. Unlike the video-based DVD that comes with our first issue, this rendition will be Xbox-quality, sporting a true 3D interface, fully interactive, and stuffed with additional features.

Q: Is the disk a DVD or a CD?

A: Although Microsoft has officially labeled it a "Game Disc," underneath it all, the **Official Xbox Magazine** Game Disc is (to get technical for a moment) a DVD-9. This hefty format allows for an impressive 8.5 GB of storage. Each DVD-9 disc is single-sided, but dual layered, allowing for roughly twice the amount of storage of a standard DVD-5, which allows for 4.7GB. So, are you imagining how many stunning demos can fit onto one of them? As you may have guessed – a helluva lot.



Q: Do I have to subscribe to get the disc?

A: Nope, you can buy the disc with the magazine each month off the newsstand. However, in order to get the disc, you do have to buy the magazine (which isn't so bad, is it?) – discs are not sold separately.

■ **OF•FI•CIAL**(ə-fish'əl): Authorized by a proper authority: authoritative. In this case, the "proper authority" is Microsoft, and that officially makes us authoritative – so there.

really, what kind of value do you put on our lives?

Seriously, though, we'll have different prices for the magazine depending on your level of commitment. At newsstand, we'll be retailing for $7.99 with our exclusive playable Xbox Game Disc. We're still working on subscription prices, but we do know that "you'll save [blank] off the cover price if you act now," and there will also be the option to subscribe to an ultra-cheap "naked" edition that comes without a disc. No matter what you pay for our magazine it'll be worth its weight in gold (or perhaps silver, depending on the going rate) for what it saves you in the long run. Test out games on our disc, steer clear of the unthinkable "bad" Xbox games with our bluntly honest reviews, and wring every last drop of enjoyment out of your Xbox with every single issue. A bargain, I tell you. An absolute bargain.

Meet the Peeps

Q: Who's writing this stuff, and what makes them qualified?

A: Without blowing our own horn, this is an all-star team, made up of some of the longest-serving veterans in the industry. Mike Salmon heads up the team, having worked previously on beloved magazines like *PC Accelerator* and *Ultra Game Players*, and he's supported by Francesca Reyes, formerly of *Official Sega Dreamcast Magazine*, and (gasp!) Sony Computer Entertainment. Joining her are Dan Egger of Daily Radar and *PC Accelerator* infamy, Frank O'Connor, also from *Ultra Game Players*, Daily Radar, and trade magazine *Games Business*, and Dave Rees, DVD Disk Editor extraordinaire, hailing from *PC Gamer* and *Incite PC Games*.

Between them, these guys have more than 30 man-years of reviewing, previewing, and playing games on every system from the Magnavox Odyssey to the very pinnacle of gaming – the Xbox.



■ **Left to right: Mike Salmon, Francesca Reyes, Dan Egger, Frank O'Connor, Dave Rees**

Q: Where can I subscribe?

A: Go to www.xbox.com and see our special offer– or simply fill out that postage-paid card that just fell out of the magazine a few seconds ago. Either way, do it now before we're all sold out.

Q: How will readers interact with the magazine?



A: By holding it, caressing it, and whispering sweet nothings to it. Actually, that's a little weird, so stop it already. One of the big ideas behind the **Official Xbox Magazine** is to make a magazine that truly serves the readers and becomes the written word for the growing Xbox community. We want the magazine to make your games better and we want you to make the magazine better.

That means meaningful letters (as well as the occasional insane rant), reader challenges, rich, elaborate strategy guides, as well as quick and dirty cheats... all this and a bunch of disc interaction so secret and ambitious, we'd have to kill ourselves for even thinking of telling you now.



You can start getting involved by going to www.xbox.com to subscribe; very soon we'll be asking you to participate in polls, forums, letters, and Q&A on our own site.

Game Reviews

Q: How are you guys going to review games?

A: Reviews will be the cornerstone of the magazine, with a simple-yet-elegant "out of ten" scoring system, but backed up with very detailed information on things like graphics, sound design, and immersion. They'll always be written by genre experts, who know the themes and styles of game types they're reviewing, and they'll be packed to bursting with exactly the information you need to make the right purchase decision. Add to that the fact that you'll often be able to actually play the game on our demo disc, and it's clear that **Official Xbox Magazine** is the best place to go for reviews.



Just Answers

In an effort to save time and avoid any sort of real communication, we've anticipated other questions you will have come up with while reading this fine mini-mag and answered them for you. It's kinda like we're seeing into the future or something. Anyway, feel free to think of any questions and then simply match that question with the most suitable answer from below:

- **Yes, it does play DVD movies, you need to buy the remote.**
- **Yup, for movies and games.**
- **Porn DVDs are the same as regular DVDs.**
- **It's just the layer switching, it happens on normal players too.**
- **Sure, as long as it isn't too heavy.**
- **Well, it wouldn't hurt the Xbox - but it does sound a bit dangerous for you.**
- **Nope, the discs are the wrong size.**
- **Try blowing on it.**

■ **WE'VE DONE THIS BEFORE:** Together, the staff has written more than 4,000 game reviews for 64 different publications on 15 different gaming systems in five different countries.

Game Disc

The Magic Disc

There are probably some technical experts who could explain in bore-iffic detail how we manage to stuff an 8.47GB disc full of Xbox goodness, but to the technologically retarded (that'd be us), it all seems like black magic. Either way, we think you'll find that the Xbox Game Disc is the single best thing ever invented by man or beast. Pick up the first issue and judge for yourself.



On your Official Xbox Magazine Game Disc every month:

- Playable game demos
- Crystal-clear DVD audio and video
- Cool, hidden goodies
- Amazing game trailers
- Interviews, features, and more!

***Not* on your Official Xbox Magazine Game Disc every month:**

- PlayStation2 playable games
- The *Kama Sutra*
- Subliminal messages to control your mind (or are there?)

Your only source for Xbox game demos and trailers

Behold the **Official Xbox Magazine** Game Disc and prepare to experience the games you've been drooling over for months. Every issue of **Official Xbox Magazine** comes with an Xbox Game Disc packed with trailers and playable demos that you won't get anywhere else. And forget everything you've come to understand about interactive interfaces. Our easy-to-use interface is presented in a brilliant Xbox-quality 3D display, and it will blow you away.



■ Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2x

Your First Time

It's been said over and over again... the Xbox is the most powerful system ever. Want proof? Just wait until you take a gander at what's around the corner... the disc of the first issue of **Official Xbox Magazine** will bring you first looks at the hottest games – like *Dead or Alive 3*, *Tony Hawk 2X*, and *Shrek* – in full-motion, crystal-clear DVD-quality video. Because our first issue will hit store shelves several weeks before the Xbox is available, it will be playable on any standard DVD player, including that soon-to-be-antiquated PS2! Finally – you can see some good games on the PS2.



■ Shrek

It only gets better

When you finally pick up that Xbox and a copy of *Halo* this November, there'll be plenty of reason to rejoice. But let's face it: one game is never enough. Grab our second issue of **Official Xbox Magazine** and try your skilled gaming hand at six stunning (and fully playable) Xbox demos and experience the wide selection of Xbox titles you'll surely be dreaming of. Only here will you be able to play jaw-dropping titles like *Munch's Oddysee*, *Mad Dash*, *Tony Hawk 2X*, *Arctic Thunder*, *Dead or Alive 3*, *Cel Damage*, and *NHL Hitz*.*

* **This list is subject to change.**

■ **DVD FACT:** The European Union is lobbying against regional encoding for DVDs, so soon you might be able to buy thrilling French and Belgian art movies for your Xbox. And episodes of *Benny Hill*.

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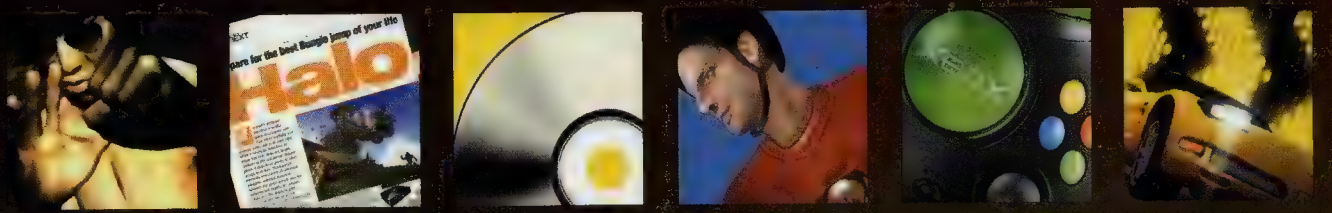
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Official Xbox Magazine

Be prepared. Be very prepared.

On November 8, 2001, Microsoft will unleash the Xbox Video Game Console – the most powerful, flexible, and staggering entertainment system ever conceived. But to immerse yourself fully in the world of Xbox, you're going to need the **Official Xbox Magazine**. On sale September 25, the magazine will be available even before the console. Why? To give you a chance to beef up your Xbox knowledge, preview the stunning software, and watch the games in motion on the included demo disc.

After the system launch, you'll have to check in with the ultimate Xbox authority – the **Official Xbox Magazine** – to really keep up to date on what's happening in the Xbox world. It's a publication dedicated to Xbox gamers, presenting the very best news, interviews, and previews of jaw-dropping new Xbox software. We'll have the in-depth features, comprehensive reviews, and secret access that only the Official magazine can bring you – with the independent editorial voice of a true fan. Paired with the **Official Xbox Magazine** Game Disc (see below), newsletter, and website, it's the ultimate Xbox source.

The Official Xbox Magazine Newsletter

There's one simple way to keep up to date with what's going on in the world of Xbox, and the **Official Xbox Magazine**, and that's to sign up for our free email newsletter. Packed full of hot gossip, cool information, and razor-sharp screens from the latest Xbox games, it's the essential tool for any Xbox fan, and it's delivered free to your email inbox. Too good to be true? Find out for yourself by signing up at:

www.xbox.com

The Official Xbox Magazine Game Disc

One of the things that makes the Official Xbox Magazine unique is the inclusion every month of the Xbox Game Disc packed with game movies, demos, and downloads. Making full use of the incredible Xbox hard drive and online technology, the Game Disc will also interact with you, the reader, featuring downloadable cheats, game challenges and essential secrets. The Official Xbox Magazine Game Disc will become the ultimate gaming resource for Xbox players. The first issue will ship with a conventional DVD, allowing anyone with a DVD player to check out the games – and yes, it will play on a PlayStation2!



SUBSCRIBE!

The easiest, cheapest, and fastest way to receive your Official Xbox Magazine is to subscribe. That way you can make sure that no undeserving miscreant snags the last copy at the local newsstand. To subscribe to the magazine, check out the subscription offer available at:

www.xbox.com

THIS IS THE BACK OF THE MAGAZINE, AFTER ALL: Much like a "family" of Sea Monkeys, the disc we produce for Issue One may not look exactly like the artist's rendition above. But it will be great.

Steel Beasts

CATEGORY Simulation (T) **DEVELOPER** eSim Games **PUBLISHER** Strategy First **REQUIRED** PII 266, 32MB RAM, 225MB HD **WE RECOMMEND** PIII 450, 64MB RAM, 16MB video card **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 8

Steel Beasts beat some pretty tough competition last year to snag *PC Gamer*'s 2000 Simulation of the Year award — especially since the hardcore tank sim was saddled with an archaic graphics engine and, until recently, could be purchased only through former publisher Shrapnel Games' website. The game managed to roll in from the left flank and snatch this highly coveted accolade the old-fashioned way: on the strength of its stellar gameplay.

Well, the non-accelerated 640x480 graphics are still antediluvian by current standards, but a widespread distribution arrangement with new publisher Strategy First means that many more gamers now get a chance to experience this classic.



This guy *thought* he had hunkered down enough...

Developed by a talented crew of programmers and assorted ex–Army tankers, *Steel Beasts* delivers the most realistic interpretation of modern armored combat that you're ever going to find on a PC. Although it ships with dozens of well-scripted tutorials, none of these primers can properly prepare you for the speed and violence with which any mistake on your part will be greeted.



Many of the bundled missions feature multiple platoons of friendly armor and infantry.

You can operate your M1A1 or Leopard 2A4 tank from the Tank Commander or Gunner's position, with a stellar AI handling any chores outside of your chosen station. You can toggle between these positions freely (or switch to an outside view or even another tank) while advancing through a mission, comfortable in the knowledge that your AI crewmates and platoon-mates will be performing their specific tasks quite capably.

Detailed ballistics modeling, Laser Range Finding, GPS, thermal imaging, and varying ammo types are all featured, as are progressive systems failures when your tank takes damage. *SB* also includes full artillery and infantry support, and the wall-rattling thunder of nearby artillery bombardments must be experienced firsthand to be believed.

Although positively diabetic in the eye-candy department and in dire need of some sort of dedicated campaign structure, *Steel Beasts* is so damn-near perfect in most other areas that it could quite handily vie for repeat honors as 2001's Sim of the Year.

— Andy Mahood

PC GAMER 88% EXCELLENT

Cultures

CATEGORY Real-time strategy (RP) **DEVELOPER** Funatics Development **PUBLISHER** Xicat Interactive **REQUIRED** P266, 32MB RAM, 225MB HD **WE RECOMMEND** PII 400, 64MB RAM **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 5

Most real-time strategy games offer little more than plotless warfare between vague combatant armies. *Settlers* broke that trend — it featured cute characters with defined personalities and a fairly detailed resource-management system.

Some of the folks who developed the first two *Settlers* games ran off and formed Funatics, and now they've released *Cultures*, a game cast in the same mold as the *Settlers* series. Unlike *Settlers*, however, *Cultures* will appeal only to an extremely specific type of gamer — the person who loves to micromanage every aspect of a strategy game.

You're part of a group of Vikings setting sail for the Americas. The main campaign is a series of resource-related missions — collect a certain amount of food, wood, or other resource, or trade a specific amount of a resource with one of the various Indian tribes you encounter. In addition to the campaign, *Cultures* also offers 12 stand-alone scenarios presenting everything from very specific challenges to "unlimited" play à la *SimCity*.

What makes *Cultures* different from other RTS games is that its focus is squarely on resource management. Combat is pretty rare and, for the most part, doesn't play a large role in the game.

In addition to micromanaging the production of resources, you must guide your citizens through their lives, and this part of the game gets particularly tedious. You assign people to each individual house, and order men and women to get married, to have children, and so on. And the scout, who explores the land still hidden by the fog of war, must be completely managed — meaning you have to tell him when to eat (otherwise he'll simply starve to death). Occasionally sloppy AI leaves citizens wandering in the woods.



It's best to group industries together. Here's a farmer, a miller, and a baker.

There's fun to be had here, but you'd better be a management nut if you're going to eke out the game's finer points.

— William Harms

PC GAMER 71% GOOD


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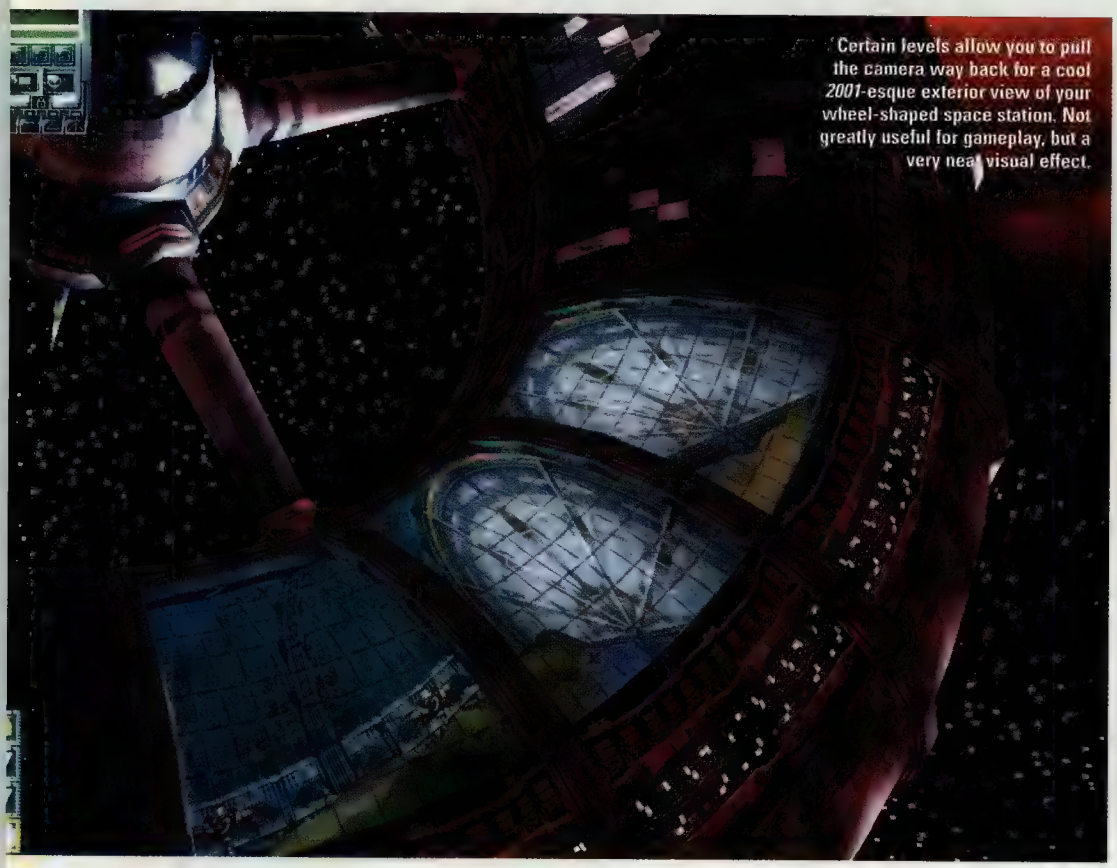
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BRIDGE BUILDER www.5starshareware.com/Games/BuildingSimulators/bridge-builder.html

This shareware lets you build little wireframe bridges (according to real physics and engineering principles) that will support the weight of a train when it travels across. There's no sound and virtually no variation in gameplay. But nothing in recent $49.99 retail games has given me anything close to the thrill I got when that train rolled across the rickety bridge for the final level, and the thing didn't collapse. Now that's gaming satisfaction.

Startopia

It's *Dungeon Keeper* in space. Only without the dungeons. But with more space.



Certain levels allow you to pull the camera way back for a cool *2001*-esque exterior view of your wheel-shaped space station. Not greatly useful for gameplay, but a very neat visual effect.



(Top) Trading is very simple: the program assigns icons to each item available to buy or sell so you can get an instant read on how good the deal is for you. (Bottom) You can zoom in on any alien in your station for a detailed look at its current state — happy, sad, hungry, sleepy, angry, etc. You can also hire, fire, and promote staff from here.

As everyone's favorite green-blooded logician pointed out in *Star Trek II*, as a matter of cosmic history it has always been easier to destroy than to create. And that, of course, is why we've seen such an upsurge of "sandbox" games and "software toys" over the past decade.

USEFUL INFO

CATEGORY	Real-time strategy (T)
DEVELOPER	Mucky Foot
PUBLISHER	Eidos
REQUIRED	PII 450, 64MB RAM, 300MB HD, 8MB 3D card
WE RECOMMEND	128MB RAM
MAXIMUM PLAYERS	4

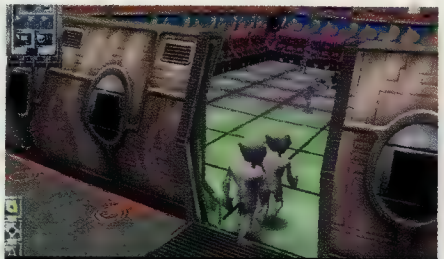
While reducing a bug-eyed monster or military installation to ashes with a jacked-up tesla rifle is easy, building something that *works* from scratch is where the real challenge, and the real addiction, lies.

Even the simplest examples of the "creation game" can beat out the most state-of-the-art explode-a-thons. I'll give you an example: in the past few months I've had some great games on my hard drive: *Red Alert 2*, *Emperor*, *No One Lives Forever*, *Half-Life: Blue Shift* (well, *I* liked it), *Day of Defeat*, *Serious Sam*... But do you know what I've played more than any of those? This stupid little shareware thing called *Bridge Builder* (see sidebar at top).

The same principle of sandbox design has been driving games like *SimCity* and its spawn for well over a decade now. Peter Molyneux hinted at the possibilities for the first time in 1989's *Populous* and has been pushing back the boundaries ever since with great titles like *Theme Park*, *Dungeon Keeper*, and *Black & White*. It's no surprise, then, that this latest entry in an ever-evolving genre comes from Mucky Foot, whose founders learned their trade under Molyneux's wing at Bullfrog.

In fact, Molyneux's fingerprints-by-proxy seem to be all over this production, which borrows heavily from games like *Dungeon Keeper*, *Populous*, and *Theme Hospital* while never seeming to quite capture all the quintessential magic of those pioneering works.

Essentially, *Startopia* casts you as a "galactic administrator" charged with building and maintaining space stations. You're a contractor, and in each of the 10 mission scenarios an alien race hires you to set up a station with certain win conditions — build a space hospital that maintains a satisfactory ratio of patients cured to patients lost, for example. Meanwhile, a "sandbox" mode removes the mission-based criteria and lets you amuse yourself within the limits of the resources you're capable of accumulating.



Some Grays just paid to enter your disco. Shame you can't hire a bouncer to keep out undesirables.



Building a Star Dock allows alien vessels to come to port in your station and trade goods.



The biodeck is a self-contained ecology that lets you grow plants that can be harvested and food and other goods to be used or traded. Land levels, temperature, moisture, and water levels can all be adjusted to help grow the right kind of plants.

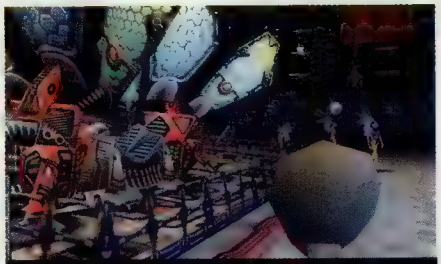
The two key resources are energy and power, although it probably would have been better if the designers hadn't picked two commodities that sound, to anyone with a bit of common sense, like largely the same thing. Energy is basically cash, used to build facilities and objects aboard your station, and to pay workers to operate them. Power is used to, well, power these facilities. If you don't generate enough of it, rooms and essential services will begin to shut down.

So as anyone who's ever played one of these games before will already know, it's one of those knife-edge balancing acts where the line between a functioning space station and a calamitous one is precarious indeed. After the initial exploratory splurges of early play, you'll quickly find yourself becoming a space miser, looking to save money (you can call it energy if you like — I'm calling it money) while gouging it from your workers and station visitors wherever possible.

As the game progresses, you're rewarded (and challenged) by the addition of more to build and operate. As in Molyneux's games, the alien beings aboard your station are governed by various needs and urges — hunger, medical care, love, sleep, entertainment, using the bathroom, and so on — and if they don't get it, you'll find it harder to make them do what you want. Or maybe they'll just leave. Or die. Either way, it's not good.

Blueprints for the various rooms and facilities are transmitted to you as the need for them arises. Things you can build to keep your aliens happy range from the functional (garbage recyclers, automatic food-dispensing machines, sleeping pods, and of course a Lavatron) to the luxurious — hotels, shops, discos, and, yes, even a space brothel (mmmm, space brothel). Beyond that you can decorate your station with all manner of minor items, such as lamps and benches, to pretty the place up.

And so it goes. Later in the campaign game, combat plays a part, but it's not particularly thrilling. You can control your forces, but on nothing like the level you'd expect from a real RTS. I just turn this option off now because I've come to regard it as a distraction to what I really want to do, which is build, create, and grow.



Attach yourself to any character in the game with an "over-the-shoulder" cam, à la *Dungeon Keeper*.



Building an alien sleep chamber. Once the floorplan is laid out, pop-up menus let you place furniture.

Chances are, if you're into this kind of game, you'll enjoy *Startopia*. But I couldn't escape the feeling that in the attempt to copy Molyneux's style so closely, some ineffable qualities were lost. While *Startopia* aspires to the same kind of Pythonesque humor we saw in *Theme Hospital* and *Dungeon Keeper*, for example, it never quite makes it. There's nothing here as funny or as satisfying as giving an imp a good slap or curing a patient with Bloaty Head.

Also, I never got quite the same feeling of creating from scratch. When I first heard about *Startopia*, I became excited as I imagined a game that would let me truly design the layout of my space station, building walls, corridors, and such individually, the way *Dungeon Keeper* let me carve my subterranean empire out of the earth. But *Startopia* simply gives you a ready-shaped space-station composed of empty, bland rectangular segments and asks you to plonk down rooms and objects within the pre-defined space. It's not nearly as satisfying, nor does it give that sense of true building that a full construction kit would have provided.

Having said that, there has to be something about *Startopia* that's kept me coming back for more. I'm almost done reviewing it, but I'm not almost done playing it. Something tells me it's the appeal of the genre as a whole more than anything in particular that this game has to offer. It's just so much fun sifting through any good sandbox like this, I'm willing to overlook the occasional clumped-up piece of poo lurking beneath the surface.

— Gary Whitta



Though the cash is running out, it's not stopping the aliens from strutting their stuff at the disco.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Generally good fun; tightly designed; pleasant sense of fun and humor.

LOWS: Only 10 missions means you'll be stuck in sandbox mode sooner than you'd like.

BOTTOM LINE: A competent riff on the Molyneux-style sandbox game, but nothing really stellar.

PC GAMER 77%
GOOD

EB TOTAL

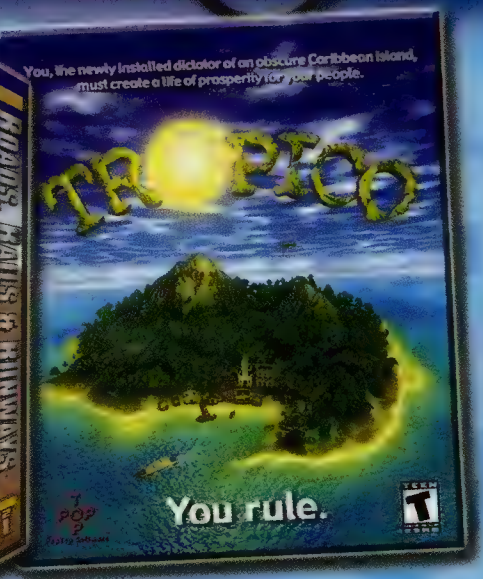
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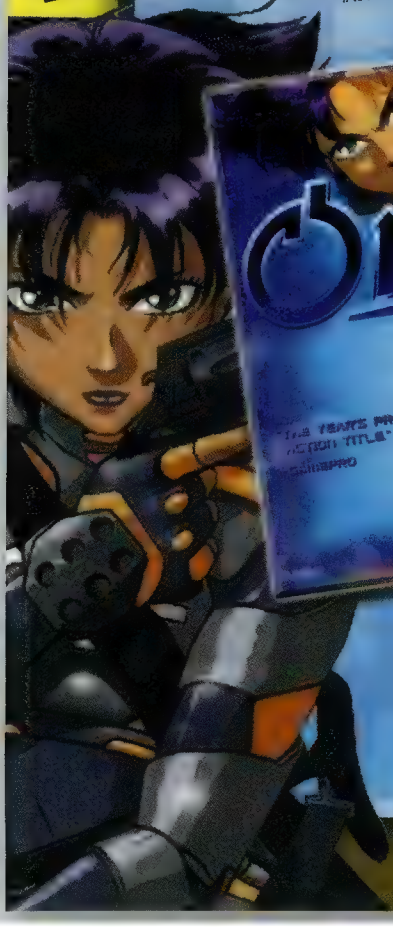
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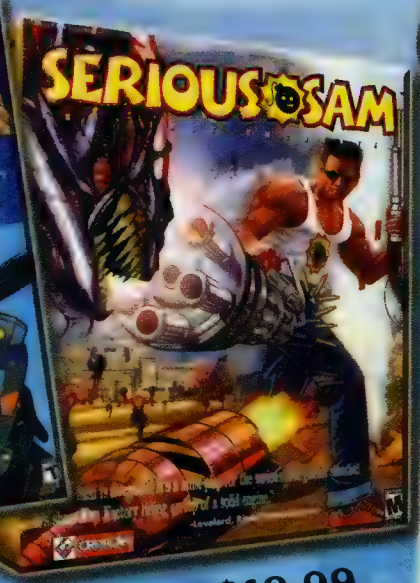


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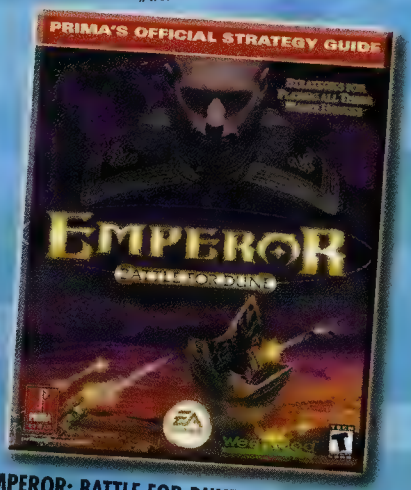
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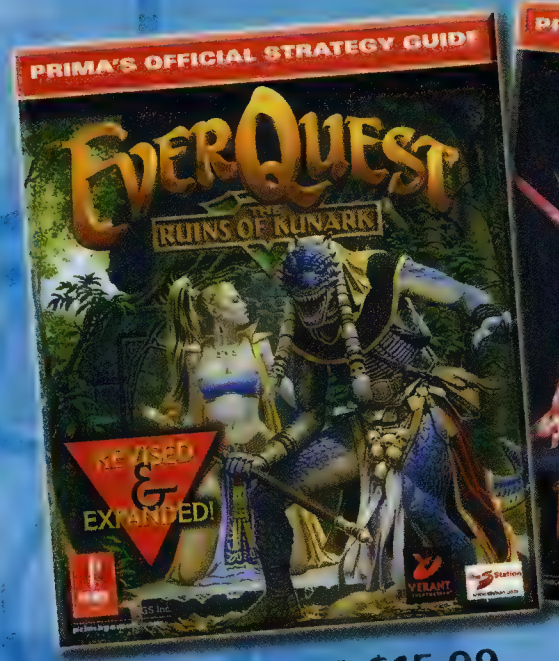
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Leadfoot

Ratbag delivers its third helping of strong, budget-priced racing.

WORLD-CLASS SERIES



We gave WizardWorks *Dirt Track Racing* and *Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars* (left) a big thumbs-up (82% and 85%, respectively). *Leadfoot* maintains a franchise that's proved surprisingly fun.

Like its immediate predecessor, *Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars*, the latest budget-priced racer from Aussie developer Ratbag delivers a first-rate simulation of off-road driving dynamics. Unlike last year's all-oval experience, however, *Leadfoot* places you in the tight confines of a covered sports stadium, where you get to duke it out with up to 15 other vehicles over a dozen twisting, undulating, motocross-style courses.

USEFUL INFO

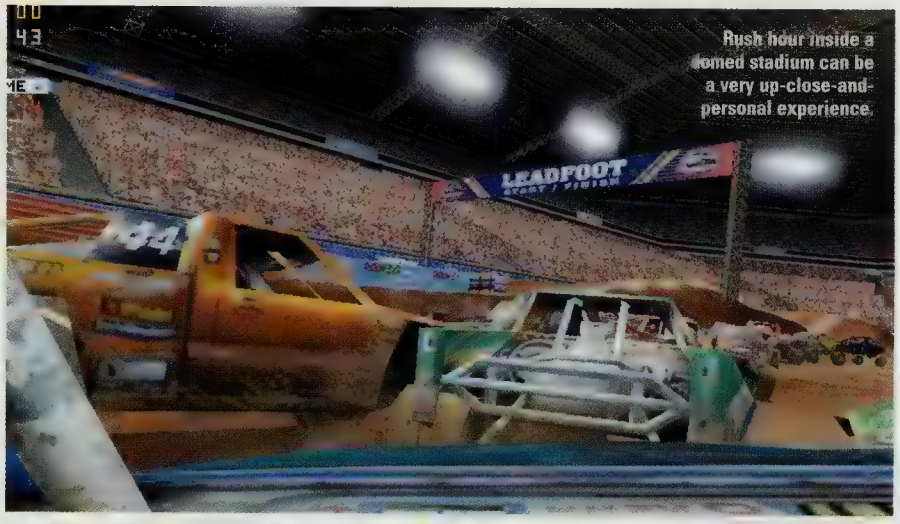
CATEGORY	Racing (E)
DEVELOPER	Ratbag
PUBLISHER	WizardWorks
REQUIRED	PII 266, 32MB RAM, 40MB HD, 8MB 3D card
RECOMMENDED	PIII 450, 64MB RAM, 120MB HD, 32MB 3D card, force-feedback joystick/steering wheel
MAXIMUM PLAYERS	8

The racing machines are dune buggies and four-wheel-drive pickup trucks that are kitted-out for high-speed, fender-banging action in front of super-dome-sized crowds.

Sound like fun? Well, it's a hoot, if not exactly a groundbreaking game. An aging engine mated to underwhelming 16-bit graphics falls short of excellence. In fact, cars and tracks aside, anyone who's played last year's *Sprint Cars* will be hard-pressed to tell the difference between the two games: there are obvious similarities in user interface and gameplay structure.

If you're going to rehash something, though, *Sprint Cars* certainly isn't a bad place to start. As with Ratbag's older game, *Leadfoot*'s single-player offerings include both a Quick Race mode and a highly immersive Career option in which you work your way through several multi-race championships. You begin this latter mode with a modest cash stake from which you purchase a Stadium Lite or Sports Truck chassis and then try to upgrade that machine as quickly as possible with performance parts financed from accumulated prize money.

Tantalizing sponsorship offers appear along the way to assist you in your climb to the top. After a protracted struggle that can involve as many as 180 events and 15 separate series, you'll eventually end up behind the wheel of a tricked-out 900-horsepower monster vying for top-dog honors against a field of similarly equipped AI drivers.



Rush hour inside a domed stadium can be a very up-close-and-personal experience.



The AI competition offers a consistent challenge.



Photo finishes may involve aerial maneuvering.

The off-road driving physics are quite convincing throughout, and the game's unrelentingly assertive AI competition puts up a consistent and challenging fight in every race. A comprehensive garage menu lets you tweak your machine's suspension and drive-train components to your heart's content, while an integrated (though non-visual) damage module will slow you to a crawl if you get a little too belligerent behind the wheel. Multiplayer enthusiasts can also partake in some remarkably smooth online races through GameSpy's dedicated Internet gaming service.

While mastering the game requires a fair degree of driving expertise, a number of configurable menu options will help newbies. Damage effects can be reduced (or turned off altogether), and the driving model and AI strength can also be subtly de-tuned to make the overall experience a little easier for casual racers.

There are some prettier racing games on the market, boasting lush 32-bit graphics and poly-counts up the wazoo, but few of them can outpace *Leadfoot* for straight-ahead entertainment value. She may be crying for a new powerplant and a fresh coat of paint, but damned if there ain't some life in the old Sheila yet.

— Andy Mahood



Octagonal tires are a dead giveaway to the game's graphics deficiencies.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Convincing physics; many tracks and vehicles; Career mode; aggressive AI; budget price.

LOWS: Dated graphics engine; minimal innovation since previous Ratbag dirt-racing titles.

BOTTOM LINE: Visually and technologically impoverished, but still a treat to drive.

PC GAMER 78% GOOD

Merchant Prince II

CATEGORY Turn-based strategy (E) **DEVELOPER** Holistic Design **PUBLISHER** TalonSoft **REQUIRED** P166, 32MB RAM, 300MB HD **WE RECOMMEND** P233, 64MB RAM **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 4

You can file this one under the heading Sequels We Didn't Know Anybody Was Clamoring For. This game originally came out in 1994, and in terms of PC gaming, those intervening years may as well be dog years. TalonSoft commissioned Holistic Design to make that original game playable in Windows, and that's about all they did and all you'll get with *Merchant Prince II*.

Renaissance Venice is the perfect milieu for a big, colorful strategy/trading game. Playing as one of this city-state's great mercantile clans, you deploy your ships and caravans to explore Europe, North Africa, and the Byzantine Empire, establishing lucrative trade routes. You can also engage in lots of ancillary political skullduggery, such as hiring assassins and slanderers to undermine your rivals. One really cool feature even allows you to appoint (or suborn) members of the College of Cardinals and get yourself elected Pope.



A fine painting as old as the gameplay.

There's a military element, too. You'll need to hire *condotierri* (mercenary units) to protect your trade routes, harass your opponents, and strong-arm closed cities into opening their gates.

In fact, you'll get more than a hint of the same classic gameplay that made the original *Civilization* so compelling. Any *MPII* screenshot will look quite a bit like *Civ*, which isn't necessarily good or bad, just indicative of the game these designers were inspired by back in 1994.

Too bad the whole thing looks and plays like it's from, well, 1994. Sure, the resolution has been goosed up a notch to 640x480, but everything still looks far too chunky. *Nothing* has been done to overhaul the clunky old interface: it remains very DOS-y, making it needlessly bothersome to perform basic functions. In solo play, the AI is monotonously anemic.



The *Civilization* influence is clear in the graphical design. Also sadly obvious are the stylings ripped from the 1994 original.

Worse yet, TalonSoft is charging a full $30 for *MPII*, while most other DOS-era classics are now packaged as parts of inexpensive collections. Even players who ache with nostalgia for the originals will be very disappointed to pay so much for so little.

— William R. Trotter

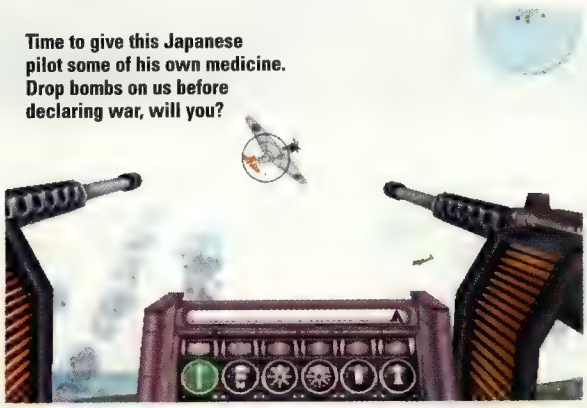
PC GAMER 50%
MERELY OKAY

Pearl Harbor: Defend the Fleet

CATEGORY Action (T) **DEVELOPER** Running Dog Software **PUBLISHER** WizardWorks **REQUIRED** P266, 32MB RAM, 100MB HD, 3D card **WE RECOMMEND** PIII 500, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D card **MAXIMUM PLAYERS** 1

Did the film *Pearl Harbor* leave you itching to emulate Cuba Gooding Jr. and blast scores of Japanese planes into smithereens? If so, you were born 50 years or so too late, and you'll have to settle for kicking the dog instead. Or maybe *Pearl Harbor: Defend the Fleet* can spare Sparky some undeserved pain.

Defend the Fleet bears that pesky WizardWorks label, which is the first indication that it'll likely be as appealing to experienced gamers as spoiled tripe. However, if you approach the game knowing that $19.99 isn't going to get you a whole lot, it may provide a few hours of cathartic entertainment.



Time to give this Japanese pilot some of his own medicine. Drop bombs on us before declaring war, will you?

You're behind the trigger of an anti-aircraft gun on the deck of a destroyer docked at Pearl Harbor the morning of Dec. 7, 1941. As the first waves of Japanese attackers — which include fighters, bombers, suicide planes, and mini-submarines — descend on Battleship Row, you have just your twin .50-caliber machine-guns to fend them off. Gradually, more powerful mounts (3-inch, 20mm and 40mm guns, a .50 Gatling, and rockets) become available to you. Ammo conservation for the more powerful weapons is crucial, and the action gets fast and furious as the game progresses. Let all of the ships in the harbor get sunk, or your own destroyer meet its doom, and it's game over.

The graphics, models, effects, and animations are mediocre at best, which again you'd expect for spending chump change. What you shouldn't have to put up with are the inability to save your game between levels; no difficulty settings; enemy planes that phase in and out of existence; and a manual that doesn't even bother to tell you the gameplay controls. (The setup's pretty easy to figure out, though.)

That said, if all you want is an old-fashioned arcade shooting gallery, *Pearl Harbor* does a nearly acceptable job of it for the dough.

— Steve Klett

PC GAMER 42%
TOLERABLE



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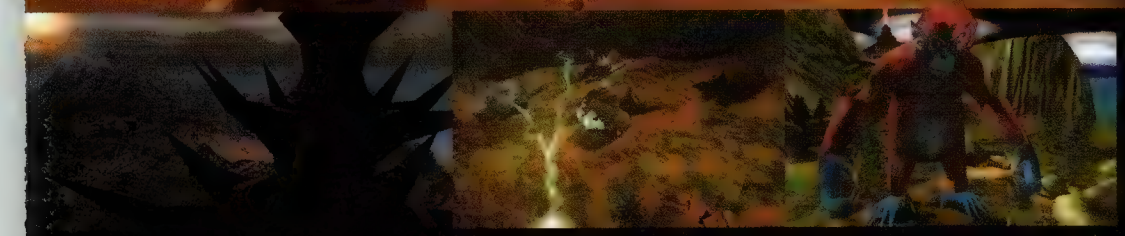
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BLACK & WHITE

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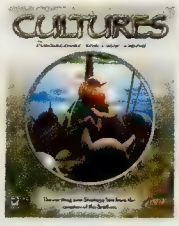
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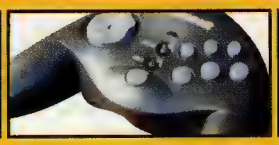
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MID-RANGE SYSTEM — ROUGHLY $1,800

CASE	
300-watt ATX form factor	$100
PROCESSOR	
AMD Thunderbird 1.333GHz	$176
MOTHERBOARD	
Gigabyte GA-7DX	$118
MEMORY	
256MB PC-2100 DDR SDRAM	$52
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM	
Creative Labs PC-DVD Encore 12x with Dxr3 Technology	$149
FLOPPY DRIVE	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	$8
HARD DRIVE	
IBM Deskstar 75GXP	$229
SOUND CARD	
Creative Labs SB Live! MP3+ 5.1	$77
MODEM	
3COM #2976 56K v.90 Hardware Modem	$49
MONITOR	
19-inch NEC FE950	$323
VIDEO CARD	
NVIDIA GeForce2 Ultra	$244
JOYSTICK	
Microsoft SideWinder Precision Pro	$53
GAMEPAD	
Microsoft SideWinder Gamepad	$23
SPEAKERS	
Logitech SoundMan Xtrusio DSR-100 — 4.1	$122
KEYBOARD	
Addtronics Keyboard	$15
MOUSE	
Logitech or Microsoft USB mouse	$39
TOTAL	$1,777

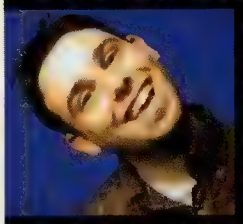
DREAM SYSTEM — ROUGHLY $3,000 AND ABOVE


CASE	
P4-ready 300-watt ATX form factor	$100
PROCESSOR	
Intel P4 1.7GHz	$389
MOTHERBOARD	
Intel 850-based chipset	$150
MEMORY	
Two sticks of 128MB PC800 RDRAM	$138
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM	
Pioneer 16x DVD-ROM	$65
DVD DECODER	
RealMagic Hollywood Plus PCI card	$50
BURNER	
Plextor 16x10x40 CD-RW	$168
FLOPPY DRIVE	
Samsung 3.5-inch 1.44MB	$8
HARD DRIVE(S)	
Two 80.0GB ATA-100 Maxtor DiamondMax	$480
IDE RAID CONTROLLER	
Promise FastTrak100 (ATA-100)	$75
SOUND CARD	
Creative Labs SB Live! Platinum 5.1	$149
MODEM	
3COM #2976 56K v.90 hardware modem	$49
MONITOR	
21-inch Optiquest Q110	$505
VIDEO CARD	
NVIDIA GeForce3	$339
JOYSTICK	
Saitek X36 Flight Control System (USB)	$96
GAMEPAD	
Microsoft SideWinder Gamepad	$23
SPEAKERS	
Klipsch ProMedia 4.1	$299
KEYBOARD	
Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$40
USB MOUSE	
Original IntelliMouse with IntelliEye technology	$55
TOTAL	$3,178

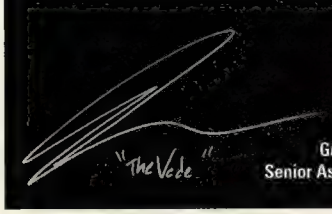
THE NEW HARD STUFF RECIEVES A FINAL VERDICT SCORE OF 110%!

YES, YES, YOU WERE probably expecting some random childhood story or something here, but there's just too much new stuff to talk about in the hardware section this month! As you've certainly noticed by now, the entire magazine has had a polish and tweak, and Hard Stuff has gotten a dose, too.



Since my very first day here on the job three years ago, I've been wanting to give scores to hardware in my reviews. The problem in the past was, What if you've got two excellent video cards — one meant for high-end systems and one meant for budget systems — and they both receive a score of 90%? Does that mean they're equal? Certainly not. Our fear, has always been that some people would get confused and end up buying something that wasn't right for them.

To remedy this situation, each hardware review will now, along with the percentage score, let you know if we're covering an "Entry-, Mid-, or Dream-" level product. A gamepad, for example, would most likely qualify for all three levels since it's meant to be used with low-, mid-, and high-end system. A laptop, on the other hand, might qualify as "Mid-" if its intended for those with a sizeable, but not over-the-top budget. Get it? I sure hope so! Let me know what you think of the Hard Stuff redesign at *gvederman@pcgamer.com*.



Greg Vederman,
Senior Associate Editor

PRODUCT TYPE

- ☐ ENTRY
- ☐ MID
- ☑ DREAM

Every hardware review now includes a chart that lets you know if a product is meant to be used with an Entry-level, Mid-range, or Dream-class computer, or if the product itself falls into one of those same three categories.

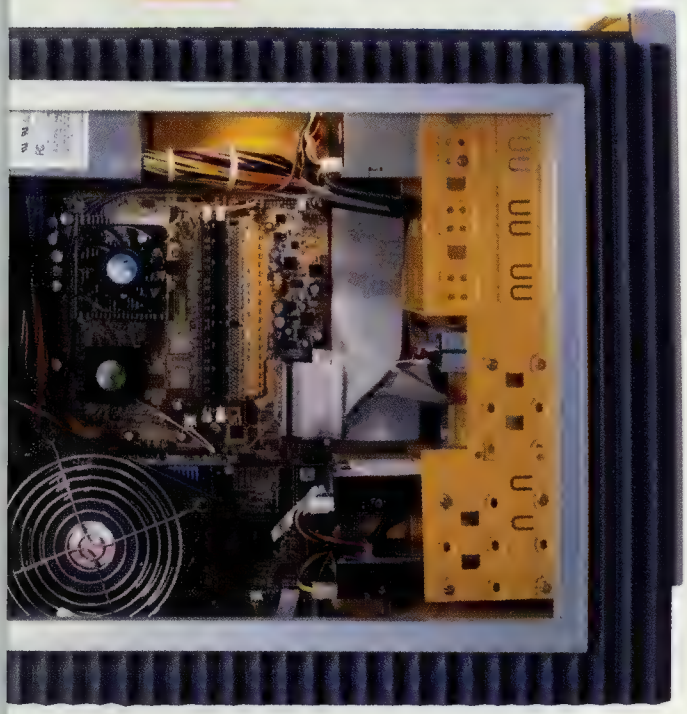
■ COMPANY VOODOO COMPUTERS, WWW.VOODOOCOMPUTERS.COM, 888-708-6636 ■ PRICE $3,599 (AS CONFIGURED)

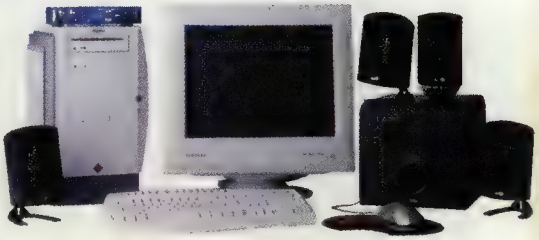
ENTRY
MID
✓ DREAM

Monsoon EGAD-DDR

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

"EGAD" INDEED! THE VOODOO MONSOON IS ONE HELL OF A GAMING COMPUTER





Talk about a *machine*. In speed tests, the Monsoon scored exceptionally high marks, completely demolishing those set by the 1GHz Voodoo system we reviewed in November 2000. Indeed, in almost all our tests, this new 1.4GHz Athlon-based system was even faster than the P4 1.7GHz Alienware we reviewed two issues ago.

■ SYSTEM SPECS

■ System: Voodoo Computers	
Processor	AMD Athlon-266 1.4GHz
Motherboard	ASUS A7M-266
Memory	256MB Crucial Technologies PC-2100
■ Storage	
Primary Hard Drive	40.9GB IBM Deskstar 60GXP
Secondary Hard Drive	40.9GB IBM Deskstar 60GXP
RAID Controller	Promise FastTrack ATA-100
DVD-ROM Drive	Pioneer 16x DVD — 40x CD-ROM
CD-RW Drive	Plextor Plexwriter 40x16x10x
■ Expansion	
5.25-inch bays	4 (2 free)
3.5-inch bays	6 (3 free)
AGP Slots	Yes
PCI Slots	5 (2 free)
RAM Slots	2 (1 free)
■ Video	
Primary Display Adapter	Hercules 3D Prophet III GeForce3
Monitor	19-inch Samsung Syncmaster 955DF
■ Audio	
Sound Card	Hercules Game Theater XP
Speakers	Klipsch ProMedia 4.1
■ Other	
Mouse	MS IntelliMouse Explorer
Keyboard	MS Internet Keyboard Professional Edition
Mousepad	Voodoo Attack-Pad
Network Card	DLink 538TX 10/100
Recovery CD	Yes
Warranty	3 years
LAN-party equipment	GearGrip bag and 25-foot Ethernet cable, Eye of the Storm Lightning Neon

There is a caveat, however: Voodoo Computers *way* overclocks its GeForce3-powered Hercules 3D Prophet III from a core speed of 200MHz to an impressive 235MHz. Then, it bumps the video-memory speed from 460MHz all the way up to 530MHz! Amazingly, after all that, our vigorous tests showed the system to be rock-solid. So you're aware, when the clocks are set back to normal, the P4 1.7GHz pulls back into the lead.

Overclocking may make some of you nervous, but since Voodoo's policy is to warranty any parts its team overclocks and tests at the factory, you'll be totally in the clear should anything go awry. To see the difference a bit o' tweaking makes, our benchmarks for this system reflect scores taken at the overclocked speed as well as Hercules' factory default speed.

While Alienware has taken to painting the outside of its computer towers in many different colors with fabulous results, Voodoo has instead decided to paint the *inside*. "Huh?" you ask. While we agree that painting the interior of a case might not be a terribly appealing idea if you rarely look inside your computer, what if that machine had an enormous transparent window for you to look through? Even better, what if the case actually lit up inside so you (and your jealous friends) could see the guts of your über-beast at all times — even in the dark? Well, it does, and you (and they) can!

This "Eye of the Storm" feature adds roughly $150 to the price of Voodoo's standard case, but we love it just the same. These days, gamers are going crazy at LAN parties with transparent cases and lights inside their systems as a way to show off to the crowds. To make any LAN experience all the merrier, the system also comes with a carrying harness that makes transporting the computer and its accessories a snap.

No one builds a cleaner system than Voodoo Computers. The company hired an expert in the art of origami to examine the potential layout options and find the best way to hide and bind all internal cables, and then had this person teach the team how to do it themselves for each system they build. One look into the Eye of the Storm window and you'll see just how much the extra effort pays off.

Included along with Voodoo's standard three-year warranty is a policy it calls "Upgrade and Restoration Insurance" — for use if you don't ever want to tinker on your own. If, at any time during the life of your system, you want to upgrade any of the components, Voodoo will arrange to pick up your tower, bring it back to their facilities, and upgrade it for you within your budget. Then, free of charge, they'll do all manner of things, including reinstalling the OS, upgrading all drivers, and tweaking the computer for maximum performance. They'll also make a new system-restore CD that reflects all the changes, and will even recable the entire machine so it looks new again.

This system isn't cheap. In fact, it's one of the more expensive personal computers on the market. But you're not paying for air. Voodoo's craftsmanship is second-to-none, and only the very best brand-name parts are ever used in their computers. You're also getting a warranty that extends two years beyond the industry standard. And hey, if it's good enough for Robin Williams — rumor has it he purchased a Voodoo after reading our last review — it's good enough for anyone.

Really, we couldn't ask for much more.

■ BENCHMARKS

For each test below, the first number is with a factory overclocked GeForce3 at 235/530MHz, and the second number is the default speed of 200/460MHz.

■ QUAKE III
(Tests run in full, 32-bit color with trilinear filtering, max.-res textures, compressed textures, and V-sync disabled)
640x480
161.3 fps, 161.3 fps
800x600
159.2 fps, 158.1 fps
1024x768
147.2 fps, 136.8 fps
1280x1024
108.7 fps, 93.5 fps
1600x1200
77.7 fps, 66.1 fps

■ 3DMARK2001
(Tests run at 1024x768 in 32-bit color with triple frame buffer, 24-bit Z-buffer, compressed textures, hardware T&L enabled, and V-sync disabled)
3DMarks: 6115, 5502
Game 1 — Car Chase
High Detail: 40.6 fps, 38.9 fps
Game 2 — Dragothic
High Detail: 43.8 fps, 37.3 fps
Game 3 — Lobby
High Detail: 53.4 fps, 50.9 fps
Game 4 — Nature:
23.5 fps, 20.1 fps
Fill Rate: 1,532.7, 1,302.9 MegaTexels per second
Vertex Shader:
44.6 fps, 38.1 fps
Pixel Shader: 86.7 fps, 73.9 fps

■ MDK 2
(Tests run in 32-bit color with trilinear filtering, max.-res textures, T&L enabled, and V-synch disabled)
640x480
179.3 fps, 178.8 fps
800x600
179.3 fps, 178.6 fps
1024x768
175.8 fps, 168.9 fps
1280x1024
138.6 fps, 119.1 fps
1600x1200
97.3 fps, 82.6 fps

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Very fast; well-cooled; uses the best brand-name parts; best overall construction in the biz.

LOWS: Its premium price is more than an Alienware but roughly comparable to a Falcon Northwest.

BOTTOM LINE: Voodoo Computers can have its EGAD back when it pries it from our cold, dead hands!

PC GAMER 95%
EDITORS' CHOICE

■ HAZARD SYSTEMS, WWW.HAZARDSYSTEMS.COM ■ PRICE $1,760.95

ENTRY
MID
DREAM

Custom Power Series

NEW KID HAZARD SYSTEMS WANTS TO PLAY WITH THE BIG BOYS



The computer we were sent by Hazard Systems has a very home-built feel to it. From the outside everything looks quite normal — which isn't exactly "normal" in the sense that most custom-PC builders go out of their way to make certain their cases set them apart from one another. Worth noting, however, is the fact that the system does include a small fan in the side of the case, installed much like Alienware's KoolMaxx. Its purpose is to blow cool air onto the cards in your AGP and PCI slots. It works well, as does the rest of the machine's ventilation system.

On the inside, the wires and cables are bound and organized, but the workmanship in this area pales in comparison to what other system builders currently provide. We grant you that critiques of this nature, like those involving the "look" of the case, may seem nitpicky. But in a market filled with system builders who all have access to the exact same hardware, it's the little things that differentiate each company.

The documentation is very good here. With every Hazard system, you'll receive a small bound notebook containing all sorts of handy info about your system and how to best maintain it. While you won't get a recovery CD, you will get a custom-made CD holding such utilities as WinAmp and WinZip, as well as all the current drivers for the hardware in your computer.

For a 933MHz PIII-based system with mid-range parts, our Hazard System computer performed quite admirably. The company also builds high-end systems, too, so if you're looking for more power (or even a bit less), they'll likely be able to give you all the juice you need.

Complete Hazard Systems computers tend to be less expensive (at least $100 or more) than what you'd expect to pay for the "same" system from Alienware. As such, the fact that Hazard's baby lacks some of the flash associated with other premium systems may not bother you.

Strangely, Hazard currently has no phone numbers to call for ordering or informational purposes: all transactions are carried out via email. As we went to press, company representatives told us that phone lines should be in place within two months, but to be honest, this situation doesn't make us feel terribly comfortable. We'll need more information about the long-term status of this company before we can recommend that you buy one of their systems.

SYSTEM SPECS

System: Hazard Systems	
Processor	Intel PIII 933MHz EB
Motherboard	A-Bit VH6-II
Memory	Crucial Technologies 256MB PC-133
Storage	
Primary Hard Drive	IBM 30.7GB 75GXP
CD-Rom	Creative Labs 52x
Expansion	
5.25-inch bays	4 (3 free)
3.5-inch bays	3 (1 free)
AGP Slots	Yes
PCI Slots	4 (3 free)
Shared ISA/PCI	1 (filled)
RAM Slots	3 (1 free)
Video	
Primary Display Adapter	Leadtek GeForce2 GTS Pro 64MB DDR
Monitor	17-inch ViewSonic A75f
Audio	
Sound Card	SB Live! X-Gamer 5.1
Speakers	Cambridge SoundWorks FPS 2000
Other	
Mouse	MS IntelliMouse Explorer
Keyboard	MS Elite Ergonomic Keyboard
Mousepad	Kensington Wrist Pillow
Modem	Creative Labs Modem Blaster 56K v.90
Recovery CD	No
Warranty	1 year

BENCHMARKS

QUAKE III
(Tests run in full, 32-bit color with trilinear filtering, max-res. textures, compressed textures, and V-sync disabled)
640x480
122.7 fps
800x600
112.9 fps
1024x768
81.4 fps
1280x1024
49.1 fps
1600x1200
30.2 fps

3DMARK2001
(Tests run at 1024x768 in 32-bit color with triple frame buffer, 24-bit Z-buffer, compressed textures, hardware T&L enabled, and V-sync disabled)
3DMarks: 2,918
Game 1 — Car Chase
High Detail: 19.6 fps
Game 2 — Dragothic
High Detail: 19.6 fps
Game 3 — Lobby
High Detail: 30.7 fps
Game 4 — Nature: 11.4 fps
Fill Rate: 521.8 MegaTexels per second
Vertex Shader: 27.4 fps
Pixel Shader: Not supported by hardware

MDK 2
(Tests run in 32-bit color with trilinear filtering, max.-res textures, T&L enabled, and V-synch disabled)
640x480
128.7 fps
800x600
110.6 fps
1024x768
82.6 fps
1280x1024
52.7 fps
1600x1200
34.9 fps

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Good price; very stable computer; includes utility and driver CD.

LOWS: Hazard seems to be in a bit of flux right now.

BOTTOM LINE: If the company's willing, we'll review another system in six months and see how things have changed. For now, no recommendation.

PC GAMER 59%
MERELY OKAY

hsq&a

Q After reading the GeForce 3 review in your July issue, I have two questions: (1) You said GeForce3 cards come with a disc with games and tech demos. If I buy an Alienware computer with a Geforce3 already installed, will that disc come with it? (2) In the "lows" portion of the Final Verdict box, you said DX8-optimized titles haven't started hitting the scene. Will games that aren't DX8-optimized run on GeForce3?
— Warren Strickler, via email

A Actually, it's up to individual board makers whether or not they want to include the demos with their card. Of the three GeForce3 cards reviewed last issue, the ELSA GLADIAC 920 shipped with just about all of the demos on its CD, and Hercules' 3D Prophet III shipped with only a few.

Having just reviewed an Alienware system last month, I can tell you that it came with a GeForce3 card but sans demos. Sadly, the Visiontek card Alienware currently uses



doesn't come with any of its own. As for your other question, yes, all of your older DirectX games will run fine on GeForce3.

Q One year ago I bought an IBM Aptiva 1GHz with 256MB of RDRAM. I thought it would be a lightning-fast computer, but it's so slow! Is it because PIIIs and RAMBUS don't work well together? If that's the case, would I be better off if I replaced the existing two sticks of 128MB PC-800 RDRAM with 256MB of SDRAM, and then just saved the spare memory for a P4 down the road?
— Glenn Nishino, via email

A While RDRAM was never intended to run optimally on the PIII platform, it's certainly not a "slow" option, and buying a new board that supports SDRAM instead isn't going to be much faster, if at all. Because you didn't mention anything else about your system, it's hard to say why you think it's so sluggish. Are you basing your opinion on other people's benchmarks? If so, don't worry: it's almost impossible to verify how different people benchmark their own systems. Everyone does it a little differently — with some tweaks thrown in here and there — and pretty soon, it's impossible to tell whose benchmarks are "real" and whose aren't. Perhaps you need a new video card, but trust me, unless there's something wrong with your computer, it should still be plenty fast.

"The Area 51 runs crop circles around the competition!"

-PC Gamer 2001



AWARD-WINNING SYSTEMS

EVOLVE



GREY™

AMD Duron™ Processor at 900MHz
High-Performance Heatsink/Cooling System
VIA KT133 Chipset Motherboard
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Floppy Drive 1.44MB
20GB 7200RPM Hard Drive Ultra ATA100
NVIDIA GeForce2 GTS™ 32 MB DDR
Koolmaxx™ Video Cooling System
SoundBlaster LIVE! 3D Sound Card
Cambridge FPS1500 5-Piece
Speaker & Subwoofer System
56X EIDE CD-ROM Player
White ATX Mid-Tower Case 300 Watt PS
Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Microsoft Intellimouse
U.S. Robotics V.90 56K Voice/Data/Fax Modem
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Financing as low as $35/MO., 48 MOS.

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Koolmaxx™ Video Cooling System
SoundBlaster LIVE! 3D Sound Card
Klipsch ProMedia 4.1 THX 400-Watt
Speaker & Subwoofer System
Pioneer 16X/40X DVD Player
Black ATX Mid-Tower Case 300 Watt PS
Black 107-Enhanced Keyboard
Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer
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Intel® 850 Chipset Motherboard
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60GB 7200RPM Hard Drive Ultra ATA100
NVIDIA GeForce3 nFinite-FX™ GPU 64MB DDR
Koolmaxx™ Video Cooling System
SoundBlaster LIVE! 3D Sound Card
Klipsch ProMedia 4.1 THX 400 Watt
Speaker & Subwoofer System
Pioneer 16X/40X DVD Player
Plexwriter 16X/10X/40X CD-RW IDE
Black ATX Mid-Tower Case 300 Watt PS
Black 107-Enhanced Keyboard
Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer
U.S. Robotics V.90 56K Voice/Data/Fax Modem
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1-Year Toll-Free 24/7 Technical Support
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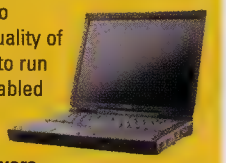
hsq&a

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 113

Q I recently read your article on the Dell Inspiron — the one with a GeForce2 Go graphics chip. You mentioned how, in certain situations, the texture compression was enabled, but that it could also be disabled. Is this just a default function of NVIDIA cards, or is there a location in the Advanced Properties tab where the feature can be toggled?

— John, via email

A Generally, texture compression (with any and all GeForce-based cards) is meant to be enabled and disabled (manually or automatically) in games that support the feature. Force-enabling the feature via a hack would take a little bit of work on your part — it's not something you can do by looking in your Advanced Properties tab — and is very likely to degrade the image quality of any game not meant to run with compression enabled in the first place.



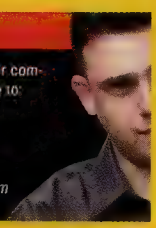
Q Who do the powers that be at Intel and AMD think we are? Do they think we're all a bunch of dumb rich guys who are going to rush out and buy their latest, fastest CPUs when we haven't even had our existing CPUs for a week? These guys are releasing new product so fast, I don't think any average person can keep up. When the first 1GHz CPUs came out, everyone was shocked at how fast and powerful processors had become. Now Intel has already launched a 1.7GHz CPU?! I know you guys at *PC Gamer* probably don't have to purchase your hardware, but us little people sure do! When will the madness end?

— Joel Magana, via email

A The truth is that, in recent times, CPUs have been increasing in MHz at a much faster pace than usual. A large part of this evolution has to do with the fact that Intel and AMD are fighting it out for supremacy — who can make the fastest chip, who can make the most money, who can corner the market. The good news is that, because of all of this competition, CPU prices are at an all-time low. And, hey, stop worrying so much! Just because a newer, faster CPU comes out doesn't mean that your system is suddenly going to start running your existing games any slower!

NEED HELP?

If you have a hardware question or comment, or a personal problem, write to:
Greg Vederman
Hard Stuff, PC Gamer
150 North Hill Drive
Brisbane, CA 94005
or email gvederman@pcgamer.com



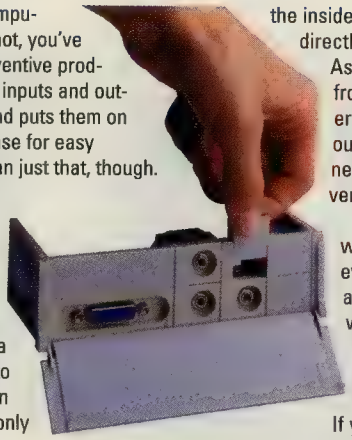
COMPANY FRONTX, WWW.FRONTX.COM ■ **PRICE** $25.90 (DIRECT PRICE)

ENTRY
MID
DREAM

CPX

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

NOW HERE'S AN IDEA THAT MAKES SENSE



Whether you need a Computer Port Extension or not, you've got to admit, it's an inventive product. In a nutshell, it takes the inputs and outputs from your sound card and puts them on the front of your computer case for easy access. There's more to it than just that, though.

The unit is extremely customizable. The default CPX kit comes with a speaker port, a headphone port (can be used as a second audio port for 4.1 speakers), a game port, and a faceplate unit that mounts into any free 5.25-inch drive bay in the front of your system. For only $6 to $8.50 (depending on the port or ports you'd like to order extra) you can add a USB port, a nine-pin serial port, or another audio port — handy if you're running a 5.1-capable sound card. FRONTX expects to start shipping video, firewire, and parallel ports in the near future as well.

Installation is straightforward and simple. Basically, all of the included ports are extension cables. From the faceplate, cables run through the inside of your system and out the back, directly into your sound card's ports. As for the mounting plate at the front of your case, it features several slots designed to house various FRONTX ports. You can slide new additions right into place with very little difficulty.

The good news is that CPX works flawlessly. During our tests, everything ran fine and dandy, just as if our gamepad and speakers were plugged directly into the back of our sound card. The extra USB port (sold separately) worked perfectly, too.

If you're the type of person who tends to change his hardware often, CPX offers a compelling alternative to reaching behind your computer case to get at your system's inputs and outputs.

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Tremor S150

TDK TRIES TO PUMP UP THE VOLUME



If you set up a new pair of speakers by themselves, without the chance to compare their performance, many will sound quite good. It's more useful, of course, to compare those same speakers to the existing king in their price range.

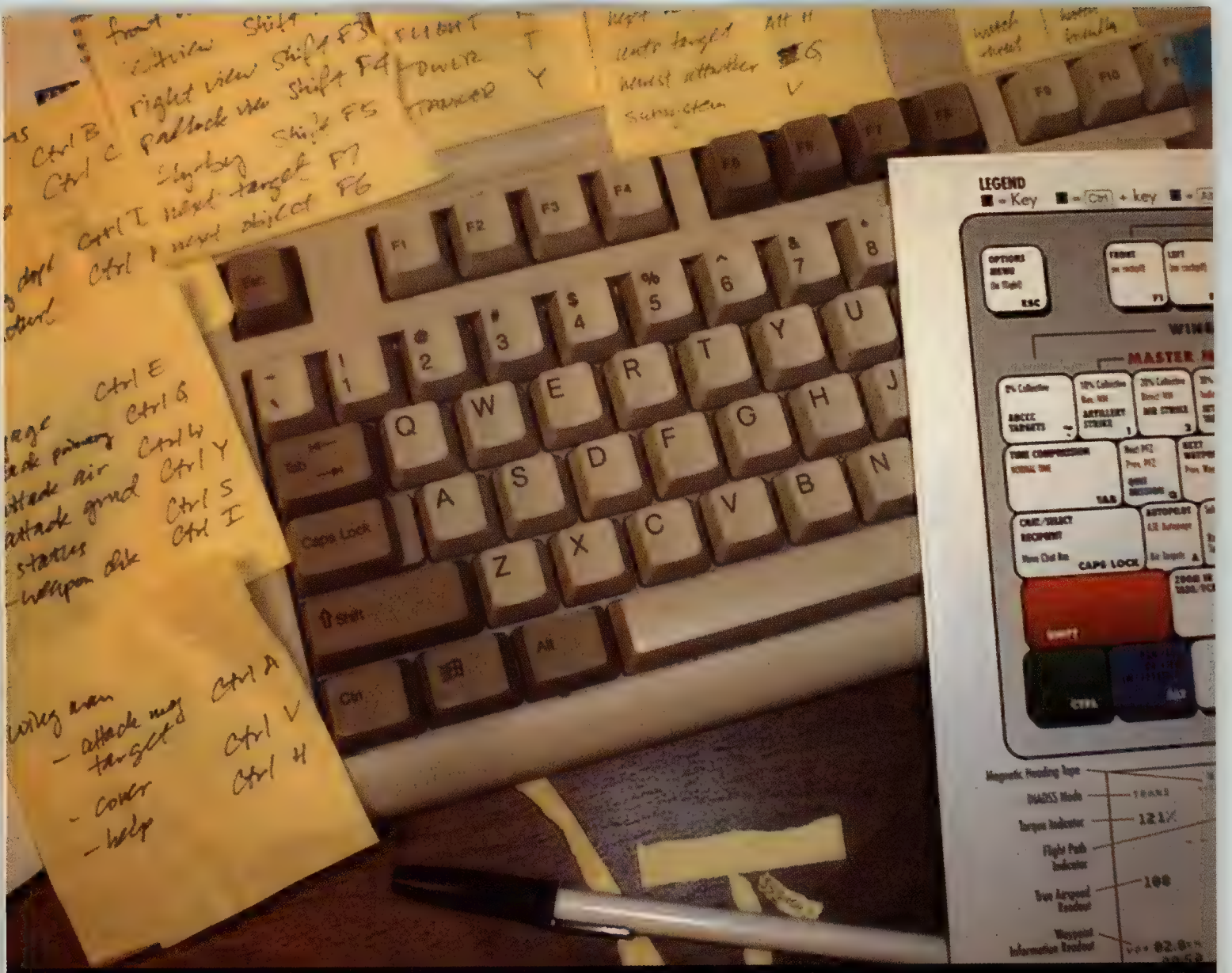
That's exactly what we did with TDK's new Tremor S150 75-watt 2.1 speaker system. After listening to these speakers for quite some time on their own, we put them up against Klipsch's 200-watt ProMedia 2.1 ($179 M.S.R.P.). As much as we liked what we heard from TDK's offering, the S150 failed to steal the crown.

The front of Tremor's box proclaims an impressive 150-watt power rating, but it's only after you look at the side of the box that you learn that these speakers deliver that much juice only under peak conditions. In an apples-to-apples comparison, you're looking at a difference of 125 watts between the two speaker sets in favor of Klipsch.

Power ratings aren't everything, however. Extra watts usually just mean that you'll be able to crank your speakers louder before they distort. In this case, we were able to crank the S150 well into the "very loud" range before we noticed any breakup, so as long as you use these speakers to play games and listen to music at your desk (and not as a substitute for a real home stereo system, as you can do with the ProMedia line), you should be fine.

Soundwise, you'll get decent bass out of the Tremor, but still not nearly as much as the Klipsch, and mids are much weaker as well. If they were 50 bones less, we'd have liked these speakers a lot more, but even then we'd still recommend you spend the extra $30 and get the ProMedia 2.1.

PC GAMER 64%
ABOVE AVERAGE



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DANIEL MORRIS
extendedplay@pcgamer.com

Pitch, Putt, and Paintball

This month, a round-up of the best — and rest — of this month's add-ons and expansions.

THE *LINKS* WORLD GROWS

FOR THOSE OF YOU (like myself) who simply never tire of a round of *Links 2001*, Microsoft has released a *Links Expansion Pack* to tide you over. And with two significant new additions to the Course Design Kits, you'll have more power than ever over the *Links* course-creation tools.

For the first time, you can add desert to the palette of course settings, and highland terrain as well. You no longer need be content with grass and lakes: send golfers over desert fairways, and set up cliffside hazards if you like.

You have hundreds of new objects to place, including tons of new trees, bushes, and hazards. All of the new stuff is compatible with the previous Arnold Palmer Course Designer that shipped with *Links 2001* (though obviously none of it is compatible with *Links* editions that pre-date the 2001 version).

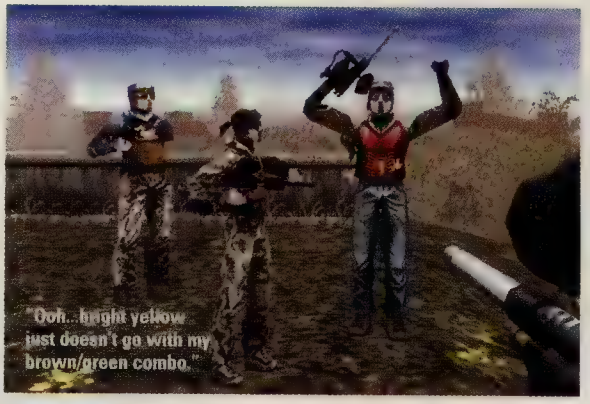


Day of Defeat's "Bridge" map pits Axis and Allies in a fierce battle reminiscent of *Enemy at the Gates* and *Saving Private Ryan*.

Perhaps best yet, the expansion includes a Course Converter that will update any of 36 old *Links* courses for full-featured use with the *Links 2001* engine. If you've got any of the old *Links LS* course-expansion discs, this impressive conversion will take advantage of the *Links 2001* graphics update.

The all-new courses are the Canyons Course at Bighorn and Thanksgiving Point. You also get greatly refurbished versions of Banff Springs (a course that dates all the way back to the earliest *Links*) and Pelican Hill.

At $19.95, the price may seem a touch steep for what you get. But particularly if you're a course-design nut, it may well be worth your investment.



DAY OF COMPLETION FOR *DEFEAT*?

THE MODDERS RESPONSIBLE for the brilliant *Day of Defeat* mod for *Half-Life* are closing in on the final 2.0 release. It can't come soon enough. We continue to play the hell out of *Day of Defeat*, a thrilling World War II combat mod. Currently finishing up version 1.3, the team is wrangling with some friendly-fire bugs (they appear to be nearing a solution) and designing some badly needed new maps.

But in the meantime, The Killing Grounds (*www.thekillinggrounds.com*) is hosting several new custom maps to feed the habit until 1.3 is ready for rollout. "Bridge" is a particularly furious firefight in which Axis sharpshooters try to prevent Allied bomb-carriers from detonating a key bridge before Axis runners can swipe some documents from across the map. Since both sides are playing offense and defense simultaneously, team coordinating and tactical organization are musts.

The designers plan to test the 1.3 build thoroughly and then release a "final final" 2.0, possibly by the end of summer. The best user mod on the web just keeps getting better.

ALL HAIL WIZARDWORKS?

FINALLY, IT MAY BE TIME for this column to issue a formal surrender in its years-long war against WizardWorks. The trouble began when the company (now a subsidiary of Activision) released the very cool *Dirt Track Racing* and *DTR: Sprint Cars*, and followed them up with *Leadfoot* (reviewed in this issue).

Now comes word that WizardWorks' new *Paintball* game is a fully cool treatment of this historically cursed FPS subgenre. With not-terrible 3D graphics, fog effects, and detailed terrain, *Paintball* turns out to be a fun little package at $19.95.

Desperate not to concede defeat, Extended Play did a little research into WizardWorks' current slate. Reassuringly, the lamentable list includes *Shark!*, *Deer Hunter 4*, *Bird Hunter*, and *911 Fire Rescue*. So they've only won a battle or two — the war rages on. PCG



***Links Expansion*: We won't stop until the whole world has been converted into golf courses.**

MY FIVE GAMES OF THE MONTH... 1. DAY OF DEFEAT, 2. THE SIMS HOUSE PARTY, 3. LINKS EXPANSION PACK, 4. HALF-LIFE: BLUE SHIFT, 5. WORLD WAR II ONLINE: BLITZKRIEG


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ROB SMOLKA
pointafter@pcgamer.com

Dedicated to My Favorite Yankee Fan



Smoke says farewell to someone special.

When I learned I was being hired at *PC Gamer*, the first person I called was my dad. I wanted him to know that all those years of "Nintendo" and "Atari" had finally paid off. Although he never understood my passion for gaming, he always found a way to afford the latest console system or computer to put under the tree at Christmas — not an easy feat on a New York City bus driver's salary. For that I'd like to thank him.

I became a baseball fan at a very early age. For some strange reason, the hapless Mets were my team of choice. My dad was always a Yankee fan. That didn't stop him from taking time away from his two jobs (he also fixed cars out in the garage when he wasn't inhaling diesel fumes behind the wheel of his bus) to bring me out to deserted Shea Stadium and watch the Mets get their heads handed to them. For that I'd like to thank him.

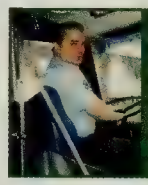
There were no two people on the planet that had as many opposing views as my dad and me. He was a staunch Republican who loved to listen to Rush Limbaugh. He couldn't stand Bill, Hillary, Chelsea, or even Socks. Every government policy that I believed in, he thought was a complete waste of time and taxpayer dollars. He never let this affect our relationship in any major way. For that I'd like to thank him.

He thought every sport other than baseball was completely idiotic. He'd poke fun at me while I was watching basketball. "What's the point of that game anyway?" he'd say. "One team runs down the court and slams the ball in the hoop, then the other team runs back down the other way and does the same thing!" Watching a hockey game in his presence was guaranteed to get a cry of "Scoooooore!" out of him, even when the puck was being contested at center ice. He hated that the announcer could get so excited by such a silly game. But if there was a big game on and he knew that it was important to me, he would let me enjoy it in peace. For that I'd like to thank him.

When I first started writing this column, he made sure to get a subscription to the magazine. He tried reading it, but it might as well have been written in hieroglyphics. It always amazed him that an entire magazine could be devoted to computer games — and that people actually paid money for it! In all the time we lived in the same house, I never once saw him pick up a controller and play a game. But he read every column just the same. For that I'd like to thank him.

Every weekend he would take me somewhere cool (usually to the campground where we had a permanent trailer set up) and spend as much time with me as I wanted. We'd play softball when the weather was nice, ice-skate on the lake in the winter, or just hang out and enjoy the surroundings. For that I'd like to thank him.

We didn't have very many serious conversations, but I had no problem learning right from wrong from his actions. He treated everyone with respect, was kind and generous to his family and friends,



He was a diehard Yankees fan, but my dad still took time off work to take me to Shea Stadium and see the Mets get clobbered.

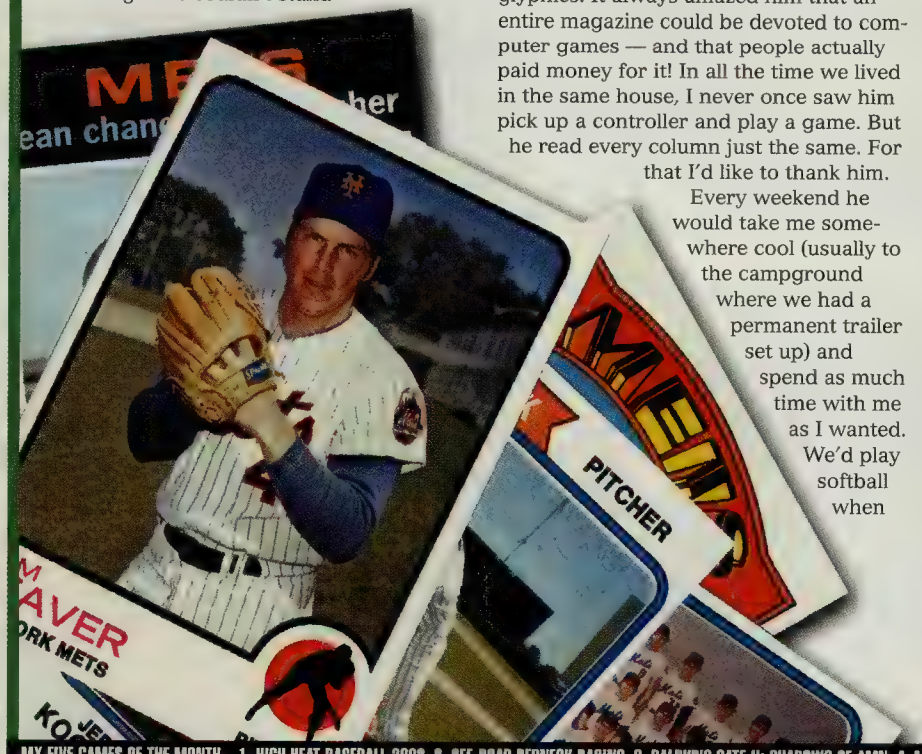
and had a work ethic that would make most look lazy. No, he wasn't perfect, but he always tried to do the right thing, and that's what stuck with me. For that I'd like to thank him.

On the morning of June 8, 2001, I got a call from my stepmother telling me my father had passed away during the night. No matter when it happens, you're never ready for it, and it struck me like a ton of bricks. I realized, though, that my dad was proud of me at the end. He worked so hard all of those years so that I could have something better. Though he never understood it, he always knew how much I loved computers and gaming, and was happy that I was getting a chance to make a living (or at least trying to these days) doing something I love to do. It's something he never got the chance to do. He never once complained, though, and for that I'd like to thank him.

This column is for you, dad. I hope you're looking over my shoulder and reading it right now, and that it makes more sense to you than the ones filled with gaming jargon that you puzzled over in the past. Thank you for all you've given and taught me, and I pray that you're up there right now, eating a few crabs, drinking a few brews, and watching the Yankees win another pennant. I'll miss you.

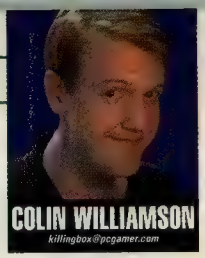
— Robert George Smolka, Jr.

IN MEMORY OF
ROBERT GEORGE SMOLKA, SR.
MARCH 27, 1937–JUNE 8, 2001



MY FIVE GAMES OF THE MONTH... 1. HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2002, 2. OFF-ROAD REDNECK RACING, 3. BALDUR'S GATE II: SHADOWS OF AMN, 4. MICROSOFT TRAIN SIMULATOR, 5. LINKS EXPANSION PACK

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COLIN WILLIAMSON
killingbox@pcgamer.com

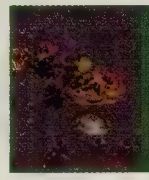
Do Dweebs Make Good Sports?

In Korea, gamers are superstars. But is America ready for geeks with sneaker deals?



If you want global competition, pick a global sport. By the way, this is soccer!

As much as I admire a great gamer, I've always been loath to group competitive gaming with "real" sports; after all, most established sporting events require more physical exertion than making a grab for the Tostitos after each CTF round. While the original Professional Gamer's League pushed tourneys as a radical breed of neo-athleticism, I've always ranked them just above the National High School Spelling Bee in terms of potential mass-market appeal.



The question is, Will the Korean games-mania dwindle when the mega-popular *StarCraft* begins to lose its luster?

Besides, show me just *one* LAN party where groupies showed up. Sorry, but ClanX_Boomstick's mom doesn't count, even if she helped unload the Athlon towers from the Dodge Caravan.

But my opinion's shifted a bit of late. Last month, I met up with several members of Battletop, organizers of a little event dubbed the World Cyber Games Championship. For those of you who aren't in the know (or don't live in Asia), this Korean gaming extravaganza is an international throw-down extraordinaire, featuring the world's best and brightest *Quake III*, *StarCraft*, and *FIFA* players.

The WCGC is no mere international LAN bash — it's an all-out digi-cyber-techno–fied clone of the Olympic Games, complete with a "Player's Village," teeming throngs of spectators (over 100,000), and a troupe of dancing girls that puts Mike Wilson's Gathering of Developers' E3 trailer trash to shame. If you read the "Gaming Goes Global" feature in July 2001's *PC Gamer*, you're probably well aware that PC gaming has hit critical mass in the Korean market, and the World Cyber Games is ground zero for the mania.

Both hardcore players and — glory be! — the *masses themselves* show up for the festivities. This is an environment in which gamers are treated with nearly the same esteem as "real" athletes.

Yet in the States, the new batch of professional gaming leagues can't overcome the geek stigma that's attached to computer gaming, even with the addition of courtesy breasts, techno music, and break-dancers. For example, a recent Battletop event held at Universal Studios Florida featured pumping music, pro wrestlers in *Quake III* outfits bludgeoning each other (assuredly the most physical "competition" on display), and a totally out-of-place Carmen Electra slogging her way through an agonizing public appearance.

Though there was more than enough hot-and-heavy DM action to go around (and a cool $15,000 check for the winner), no amount of meaningless glitz could disguise the fact that "LAN parties" are parties in name only. Stick-thin *Quake* stars can't even make the claim to intellectual stature that *chess* players can. This is, after all, a fast-paced twitch game where he with the quickest, caffeine-driven reflexes wins.

Not that I'm bashing the players themselves, of course. Hell, I belong to a *Quake III* clan (a very bad one, I might add), and riding high at the top of the leader board is only a pipedream for me and my undeniably crap clan-mates. I admire guys with skillz, but I'm not sure they're pioneering a new generation of cyber-athleticism.

So here are a few words of advice to Battletop, the CPL, and any other gaming leagues who want to position themselves as infinitely hip with the American jet-set crowd: *good luck*. We live in a society in which computer gaming is considered a terminally dweeby hobby, and no amount of marketing hyperbole or over-the-top sex appeal can change that fact. So instead of blowing half your event budget on celebrity appearances, reallocate it to a truckload of Jolt cola and 10-gallon bowls of tortilla chips. They'll be better appreciated by everyone. PCG

FEEL THE POWER



Pro gamers of the new century will find themselves assisted by retrofitted Nintendo Power Gloves, snazzy leather outfits, and VR goggles that increase their sex appeal by a factor of 37.

MY FIVE GAMES OF THE MONTH... 1. TRIBES 2, 2. COUNTER-STRIKE, 3. QUAKE III: ARENA, 4. HALF-LIFE: BLUE SHIFT, 5. DAY OF DEFEAT



MICHAEL WOLF
alternatelives@pcgamer.com

Open-Sourcing RPGs

Will Wizards of the Coast's applying an Open Source concept to AD&D affect CRPGs?

Seattle-based Wizards of the Coast (WotC) has long been an innovator in the world of tabletop and pencil-and-paper roleplaying games. Its latest project, which could have a huge impact on the future of computer RPGs, is known as "Open Gaming," or the "d20 System." WotC is proposing, basically, to release the core rules of the 3rd Edition of AD&D as free to any and all, so potential developers can copy, modify, and distribute these rules as they desire.



Decades of TSR's copyright-protection litigation is over with the creation of Wizards of the Coast's d20 System.

Here's how it works: the "d20 System" contains almost all the core rules of the 3rd Edition of Advanced Dungeons & Dragons — details like the description of major character stats (such as Strength, Dexterity, and Intelligence), how die rolls work, and the basics of how to apply modifiers to die rolls to come up with certain results during combat (such as how size modifiers affect Armor Class). This information is much like the Open Source concept of software publishing — anyone and everyone can freely copy, modify, and redistribute the rules however desired. If a group of players doesn't like the way a certain rule is worded, and they have a better idea of how it can be said and implemented, they can simply change it and redistribute it for other players to use and improve upon.

All great, right? Well, the Open Game License (OGL), the rules that dictate how the d20 System can be used, doesn't allow anyone to republish or distribute two very important sets of instructions — how to *create* characters that use the rest of the rules, or how to take those characters and apply gained experience to them (otherwise known as "leveling up").

It's an ingenious plan. WotC has opened up the AD&D universe to myriad publishers who can freely create campaigns that pull from the best-known roleplaying system on the planet, modifying the rules where needed to fit their own settings, and sell the books without having to pay WotC any sort of licensing fees. These books could include ones that introduce new universes for players to explore, new creatures to battle, or new races to play.

The idea could have some strong merit when it comes to the computer roleplaying market. Think of it: after spending 80 to 100 hours with a group of characters in one roleplaying game, it would be a simple matter to take those same characters and import them into a completely new game from a different developer — as long as it supports the d20 System. The characters translate over with all their stats intact, ready for a new adventure in a totally new setting.

The worlds of online roleplaying would open up as developers, freed from the necessity of licensing a pre-created system, could spend the saved money and extra time creating enthralling and entertaining worlds for us to explore. The universal rules could apply to a sci-fi epic as well as a present-day thriller or fantasy-based adventure.

There are significant problems, however, with WotC forcing players to purchase the *Players Handbook* so they can incorporate methods of *how* to create or apply experience to characters. This limit to the open system (which seemingly keeps WotC in business with the need to own a *Players Handbook*) would severely limit any CRPG from adopting the format.

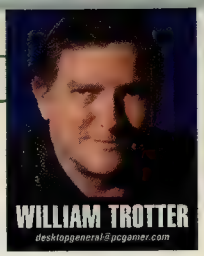
It does seem that Wizards of the Coast — which has said for a while that it's committed to incorporating computers more and more into its roleplaying systems — has a solution up its sleeves for CRPGs. Currently, WotC is working with Fluid Entertainment to create D&D Master Tools, a software package that will support Dungeon Masters in creating and maintaining campaigns, in much the same way that the Character Creation software included with the *Players Handbook* greatly simplifies the process of making basic characters.

For now, though, I'm waiting with baited breath to see how game developers will incorporate the licensed and paid-for 3rd Edition rule set into CRPGs like *Neverwinter Nights* and *Pool of Radiance: Ruins of Myth Drannor*, and how it will differ from RPGs that have used the 2nd Edition rules, such as *Baldur's Gate*. The flexibility of the 3rd Edition rules could mean plenty of intriguing differences on the CRPG front. But that's a whole column unto itself... PCG



Neverwinter Nights will use the 3rd Edition of AD&D, but will future incarnations use a generic d20 system that doesn't require paying licensing fees to Wizards of the Coast?

MY FIVE GAMES OF THE MONTH... 1. BALDUR'S GATE II: THRONE OF BHAAL, 2. ANARCHY ONLINE (BETA VERSION), 3. MYST III: EXILE, 4. BLACK & WHITE, 5. TRIBES 2



WILLIAM TROTTER
desktopgeneral@pcgamer.com

Is This Battle in the Budget?

Two experts have evolved a new theoretical tool for achieving solid designs in wargaming.

If you've played any of the "monster" campaigns in HPS' *Normandy '44*, you know that the Allies' best hope of victory lies in applying constant, grinding pressure against the Germans at every point of contact. If you do this, of course, many of your units will become broken, demoralized, or prostrate with fatigue. But what the hell — they're only pixels, not flesh and blood.

Unlike Eisenhower and Montgomery, you won't face censure or political upheaval if the butcher's bill becomes excessive. As we often explain, it's only a game, so you're free to concentrate on purely *military* considerations.

But historically, commanders have seldom enjoyed that luxury. Depending on public and political expectations, there is an acceptable threshold of loss — cross that line, and the public may withdraw support, perceiving that the announced military objectives are no longer worth the cost of attainment. In the Falklands War, for example, the British public was willing to accept only "minimal" casualties in order to reclaim a handful of barren islands whose human inhabitants were vastly outnumbered by the population of sheep.

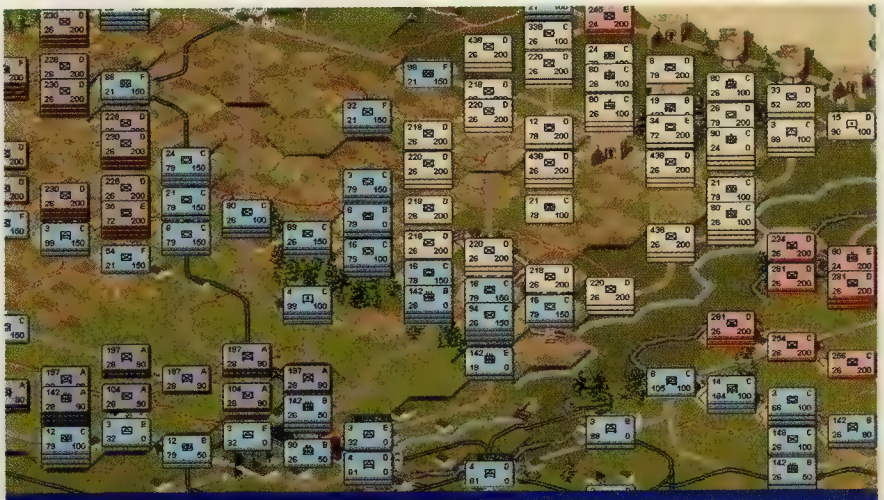
You could also cite a closer-to-home example, by comparing the Vietnam War battles of Ia Drang and Hamburger Hill, both of which resulted in high American casualties. Ia Drang occurred during the early years, and was considered both a stunning victory and a vindication of air-mobile tactics. Hamburger Hill took place



Unlike Eisenhower and Montgomery, you won't face censure or political upheaval if the butcher's bill becomes excessive.

years later, when the public's mood had soured, and was considered a horrible defeat — but in tactical reality, it accomplished the near-total destruction of an entire NVA regiment.

Following this logic, two distinguished wargamers recently posed the question: "How do we implement military caution in artificial environments such as commercial wargames?" Recently, John Tiller, the prolific designer of HPS' campaign games, joined forces with Lt. Col. Matt Caffrey (USAF), wargames guru at Maxwell AFB's Air College, to brainstorm this issue. What they came up with is the concept of "Casualty Budgets."



Normandy — the campaign that brought this issue to the fore.

"We're trying to add a new element of realism," says Tiller. "In most military actions, the participants are often constrained by the effect of potential losses in a way that transcends a purely military analysis of the situation."

Wargamers typically feel *no* cautionary restraints — they commit forces prodigally and take risks far beyond anything that could realistically have happened in the situation they're simulating. The notion of a Casualty Budget thus becomes a very useful way of "legislating caution."

Essentially, the CB for most games would be a scoring mechanism expressed as a simple equation. A CB of X is in effect for a given turn. If the player exceeds his budget by incurring losses of Y, then Y–X victory points are deducted. Players may, of course, exceed their budgets at will, but will know they'll be penalized for it.

Casualty Budgets come in two flavors: "fixed" and "variable." A Fixed CB gives the player a single numerical value against which he must manage his forces every turn. In the case of a Variable CB, the player starts with one numerical constraint, but receives higher (or lower) budget values at predetermined points in the historical timeline. "This setup would be particularly appropriate for Normandy," says Tiller, "where the Allied player must pace offensive action to work within the constraints of budget, even though his total casualties might end up being much larger in comparison."

Tiller and Caffrey think wargame plans should factor-in the CB just as they do armor, ammo, artillery, and air support. "Running out of your Casualty Budget can be just as damaging as running out of ammo — a classic case of 'won the battle/lost the war.'"

Interested readers can find out more by reading the pair's entire paper online at *www.strategypage.com*. POG



Dominating The Colonel's playlist this month is John Tiller's new HPS campaign game *Tobruk '41*, arguably the best North Africa simulation ever. It covers the early British victories over the Italians, the thunderbolt riposte of Rommel's Afrika Korps, the sieges of Tobruk itself, and the whole of Operation Crusader — a vast, far-flung campaign that swept back and forth across the sand-seas of North Africa. In contrast to Normandy, this is a war of *maneuver*, and the AI does a great job of simulating Rommel's ferocious cut-and-thrust tactics. Tiller's out-done himself with this one!

MY FIVE GAMES OF THE MONTH... 1. THE LONGEST JOURNEY, 2. TOBRUK '41, 3. WORLD WAR II ONLINE: BLITZKRIEG, 4. WATERLOO: NAPOLEON'S LAST BATTLE, 5. THE WAR OF 1812



ANDY MAHOOD
simcolumn@pcgamer.com

Falcon V Takes Flight

You thought it had been shot down. But the *Falcon* series is back in action.

Infogrames press release, May 2001: GRAPEVINE, TEXAS — Falcon *Lives! G2 Interactive, Inc., a Texas-based interactive-entertainment publishing company, has signed a Letter of Intent with Infogrames Interactive, Inc....that would grant [it] the right to develop and publish titles based on the* Falcon *line of flight simulations.*

Sweet hallelujah! I can already hear *Falcon 4.0* fans around the world rejoicing at this momentous news. Anyone who reads this column on a regular basis knows the high regard I hold for the MicroProse-developed F-16 sim, but my enthusiasm for the game pales in comparison to that of the true "Falconeers." Hell, I'm pretty sure some of these people still haven't left their homes since loading the game onto their hard drives back in 1998.



Flight-sim fans can expect to see *Falcon V* take flight sometime in 2002.

After three years of patches, add-ons, modifications, and other assorted enhancements from a number of third-party sources, *Falcon 4.0* is finally going to be replaced by a spanking-new, honest-to-god shrink-wrapped retail release. And military-flight-sim fans can thank the dedicated folks at G2 Interactive for this remarkable development.

When it acquired the MicroProse brand from Hasbro in 2000, Gallic gaming giant Infogrames also assumed the intellectual property rights for the mothballed *Falcon* line. But about all this really meant to most flight-sim community stalwarts was that the *F4* source code would finally be laid to rest under (*cough*) French soil. Little did we know that a pair of never-say-die entrepreneurs by the name of Claude Cavanaugh and Eric Marlow were hard at work trying to ensure that that funeral never happened.



What's in a name? *Falcon 5.0* (actually, *Falcon V*) could very well be the most significant combat-jet sim to be released in years.

A development group called Force 12 Studios is being assembled to spearhead the new project, and its crew is expected to include 15 to 20 full-time employees by the time its first title — officially named *Falcon V* — gets up to speed.

So, what can flight-sim fans expect to see in this return to the *Falcon* series? For the answer to that, I went directly to G2's Marlow, formerly a key member behind the iBeta series of *F4* realism patches and a long-time member in good standing of the hardcore *Falcon* community.

"First and foremost, we are targeting a sim that appeals to many different users." He explains. "Without a doubt the *Falcon* legacy will continue in terms of high-fidelity realism. If anything, we probably will be adding additional features that many of the hardcore are looking for — new aircraft, a new expanded campaign theater, naval engagement, and end-user tools to allow people to create new aircraft, cockpits, and sounds. There will also be a 'streamlined' version that contains only the features that appeal to casual gamers."

The new theater will be the Taiwan Straits, and it'll incorporate the same fully dynamic campaign engine as *F4*. "We want to develop a database of units that incorporates contemporary and near-future military hardware. Given the scenario and the theater, this should allow us to place in the game vehicles such as the F-22, JSF, Patriot Pac-3, Aegis with TBM capability, and different SU-27 variants."

And how will the new project affect all of the current third-party developers, such as eTeam and the Reality Patch Group, who have been nurturing and advancing the *F4* legacy for almost three years now? "I've been in contact with all of the groups offering modifications and add-ons to *Falcon 4.0*," says Marlow. "Everyone to date has been very helpful and understanding of the situation, and has pledged their willingness to cooperate with us and to support the *Falcon* legacy."

The infamous leak of *F4*'s source code has spawned an unprecedented bonanza of modifications and tweaks to the sim over the past year. It would appear that any continued debate on the ethics of further unauthorized source-code hacking "for the good of the *F4* community" can now be retired as moot. The people currently guiding *Falcon*'s future are well-respected members of this same community, and their vision for *Falcon V* appears to be one that can be embraced by everyone involved.

These guys are Falconeers, after all. PCG

MY FIVE GAMES OF THE MONTH... 1. MS TRAIN SIMULATOR, 2. GRAND PRIX LEGENDS (WITH NEW LE MANS AND BANKED MONZA ADD-ON TRACKS), 3. WORLD WAR II ONLINE, 4. STEEL BEASTS, 5. NASCAR 4

Infogrames and Spellbound Present

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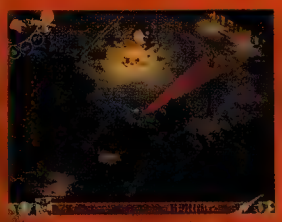
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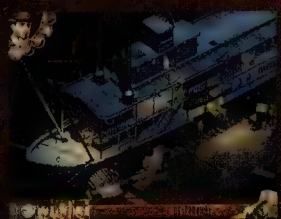
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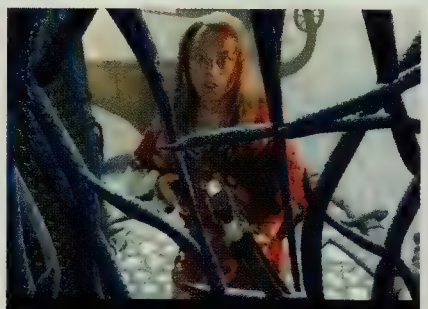
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Myst III: Exile

Once again, Atrus has gotten himself into a pickle, and it's up to you to get him out of it. *Myst III* isn't nearly as difficult as *Riven*, but you'll still find plenty of challenges. Here's how to solve some of the trickiest.

J'NANIN — AGE OF LEARNING

To get into the tower to confront Saavedro (the thief who stole Atrus' new Linking Book), use the elevator at the base of the tower. It'll provide access only if it's set in the correct position — otherwise, the door doesn't face in the right direction. To set it, stand outside the elevator and hit the lever that sends it up the shaft. Head down the crawlspace underneath the elevator after picking up Saavedro's journal (on the hammock). The various diagrams and sketches in the journal include instructions on how to manipulate the gears and levers in the shaft.



There are many ways to finish the game, but one of the best is to get the book from Saavedro.



The pressure gauge needs to be right here to successfully fill the airship in Voltaic.

VOLTAIC — AGE OF ELECTRICITY

Voltaic has several difficult puzzles, but the valve puzzle is one of the most annoying. To inflate the airship held in dry dock, hot air must be sent over some pipes. From where you first arrive, follow the path to the left and walk all the way to the end (stay to the left when the path forks). Climb down the high ladder and make your way to the end of the path to find the valves in question. To manipulate the valves, you must first climb up the maintenance ladder around the corner and head into the lava chamber, where it's a simple matter of throwing the switches you see there.

Now, head back to the valves. There are three tiers of four valves, but the lift is pneumatic — to reach the second tier, the pressure indicator must be in the yellow zone, and to get to the third, it must be in the red. Just do the following: On the first tier, close all the valves. Go to the second tier and close three valves (any three will do). Go to the third tier and close only one valve (again, it doesn't matter which). Head back down to the second tier and open one valve (so two are closed and two are open). Then go down to the first tier and open three valves. That will put the pressure gauge at 19 — the exact amount needed. Head around the corner, spin the main valve, and the airship will inflate.

NARAYAN — AGE OF BALANCE

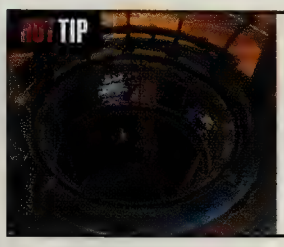
The final Age contains one of the most devious puzzles in the game. It requires combining the four four-word tenets of Age-building written in Atrus' journal with the symbols gathered in each Age, as well as with the similar symbols displayed on the walls of Narayan's entrance.

When you first arrive, you'll notice a small shield blocking off one of the exits and a larger shield surrounding the entire area. To bring the shields down — and consequently finish the game — make sure power is sent to the two podiums downstairs. (Throw the switch on the roof to send down power.) Next, look at the symbols gathered from the various Ages. Look for the tenets of building an Age written in Atrus' journal (the tenets are written in bold). Each Age symbol consists of two symbols that correspond to two words from each four-word tenet. Simply find the missing words from each Age symbol and re-create the phrase on the first of the two podiums to send them power. (The first word of the phrase goes at the top, and then continues clockwise.) It doesn't matter where each phrase is located — look at the screen shot (left) for a sample solution.

Once you enter the three phrases from Voltaic, Amateria, and Edanna, the shield blocking off the nearby doorway dissipates. Head outside and downstairs to find the last two symbols that correspond with the final, Narayan-based mantra. Flip the switch to send power to the last podium, enter the four-word Narayan-based phrase, and the outer shield surrounding the entire platform will dissolve, leading to the final puzzles of the game.

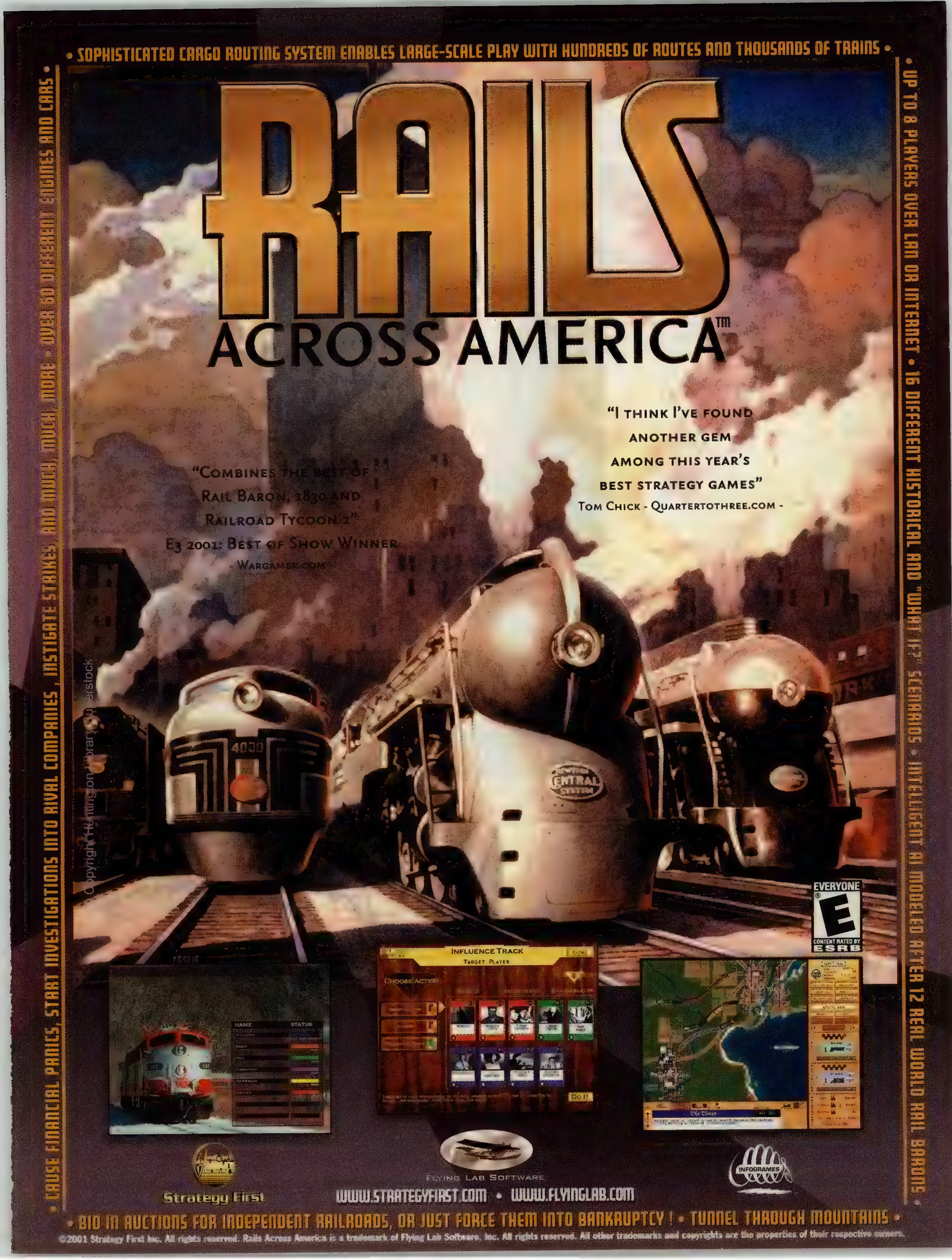


Use Atrus' journal and the symbols scattered around the room to discover the proper patterns to input here.



TIP

Look under the elevator to find the way inside the main tower on J'nanin.

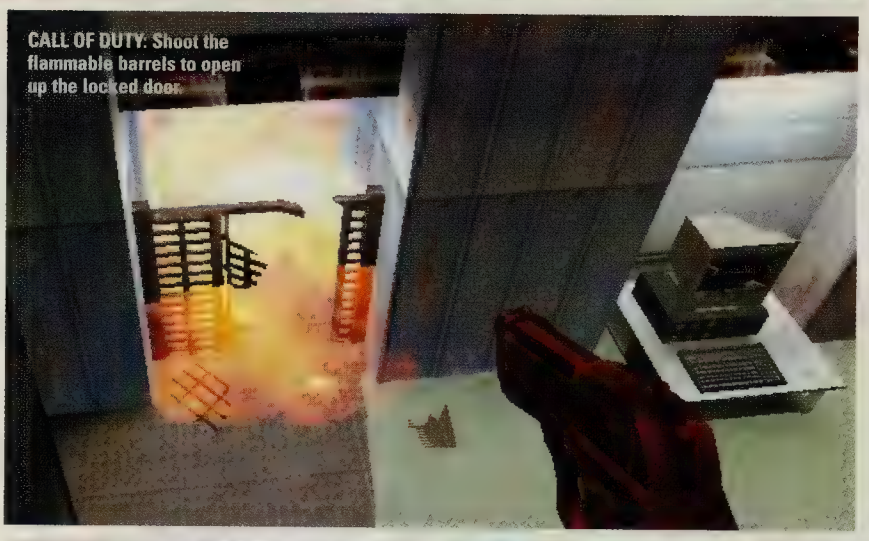

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Half-Life: Blue Shift

It's another trip back to Black Mesa, our favorite top-secret funground. Only this time, you're the doughy rent-a-cop who'd normally die in the first 10 minutes. But with our help, you may actually make it out alive.

CALL OF DUTY

- Grab the crowbar and head to the right. Look for the fuse box and shoot it.
- Go through the now-unlocked door, jump over the acid, and go up the ladder. Look down at the barrels on the other side of the locked door and shoot them.
- Move into the drainage canal and go through the door on the right. Turn off both steam valves, and then turn on the power in the control room.
- Go out through the same door and walk across the catwalk until you get to another ladder. Climb up and fight your way past the aliens. When you get to the platform with the explosive crate, push it into the rushing water and wait for it to destroy the enormous gears before moving on.



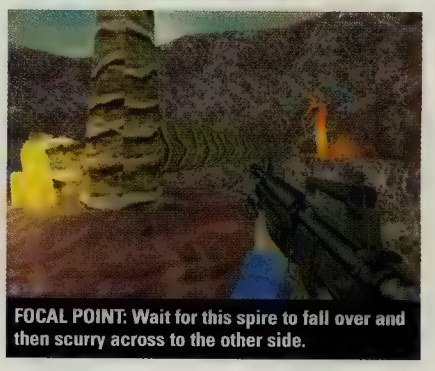
CALL OF DUTY: Shoot the flammable barrels to open up the locked door.

CAPTIVE FREIGHT

- Move through the steam tunnels until you get to a blocked area with a broken air shaft. Pull over the nearby metal crates and use them to hop up into the air shaft.
- Crawl through the shaft until you end up in a utility closet. Kill the two marines, and then talk to the scientist in the room. Gear up and move on.
- Take care of all the marines in the parking lot. Kill the soldier in the second-floor window, and then use the nearby crates to hop up and climb through.
- Make your way to the left and go into the warehouse. Kill all the marines and move out into the trainyard. Shoot the wooden stops out from underneath the enormous spools to move the spools out of the way. After killing all the soldiers, enter the next trainyard. Go to the controls and flip both switches. Hop into the engine behind the freight car and move it forward until it crashes. Free the scientist inside.
- Keep the scientist alive as you fight through the soldiers, move down to the basement, and then take the elevator up to the old lab.



CAPTIVE FREIGHT: Shoot those wooden stops to move the enormous spools.



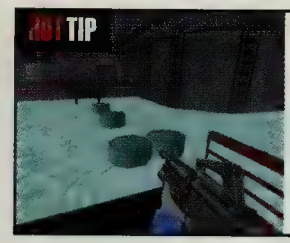
FOCAL POINT: Wait for this spire to fall over and then scurry across to the other side.

FOCAL POINT

- Move your way through the border world, killing anything in your way.
- Jump past the first set of floating platforms, and then proceed to the second set. When one of the huge green spires is knocked over in an explosion, use it as a bridge to proceed past the chasm.
- When you get to the scientists' outpost, turn on the generator and then align the emitters by turning the dials until the lights turn green. Run through the nearby tunnel to the teleporter that'll take you back to Black Mesa.

POWER STRUGGLE

- Move to the right and listen to the guards, then move back to the left and wait for the soldiers to burn through the door. Make your way past all the marines.
- Use the metal drum to complete the explosive circuit to the door, and then press down on the plunger to blow the door open.
- Turn the valve on the coolant pump and then take the elevator downstairs. Arrange the barrels in a line on the floor so that you can jump from one platform to the next. Go back upstairs and turn the coolant-pump valve again. Then use those barrels to jump across the coolant.
- Turn on the power, then return across the barrels. Retrace your steps until you come to some stairs, then go up and use the nearby switch to raise the platform. Follow the platform across and then power up the energy cell.
- Return to the scientists and follow their instructions as you use the teleporter to finally escape from Black Mesa. You've made it!



QUICK TIP

POWER STRUGGLE: Lower the coolant, put the barrels in a line, raise the coolant, hop across.

Cossacks: European Wars

Ready to jump head-first into a European battle royale but not sure how? Follow these simple tips and let us show you the way to glorious victory against your foes!



In great numbers, upgraded pikemen make a strong defense. Inset: Have your units (especially heavy ones) facing the enemy's direction before a battle starts.

BEGINNING BASES

- Build a mill with your peasants and upgrade it. Then build a town hall and create 10 new peasants. Build a second town hall after that along with another 10 peasants.
- Now, create a blacksmith and two barracks. Use them to create several pikemen for an early defense.
- Build a storehouse quickly, and assign peons to start collecting food.
- Upgrade your pikemen for defense in case of a rush.
- Build a market and buy food to supply your army by trading it for gold or coal.

KEY KNOW-HOWS

- Always build at least two barracks and two town centers.
- Use one barrack to develop upgrades while the other is producing pikemen. Start cranking out pikemen as soon as possible, as there's a good possibility you'll be attacked early in the game.
- Place buildings close together to better defend and manage them.
- At the start of the game, send pikemen out in groups of two to all four corners of the map to locate your opponent(s).
- Use either pikemen or drummers as scouts, not peasants. Peasants not only have a shorter line of sight, but they are also easily captured and can be made to build town halls for the enemy.
- To ensure your buildings aren't easily captured, post two pikemen at each one.
- You can capture towers by capturing the peasants constructing or upgrading them.
- Go for percentage upgrades after point boosts. 10 + 5 + 15% is better than 10 + 15% + 5.
- To avoid long turning times for some big units, like cannons, make sure your forces are facing the favored direction at all times.

TACTICAL TIPS (WARTIME)

- As soon as you've created two groups of 36 pikemen (72 in all), send them to attack your opponent from two different sides. This will keep him busy and diminish his army.
- Back your attack formations with officers, as a fully upgraded team of 30 officers can give you a lethal advantage. They take a lot of punishment and can really deal some heavy damage.
- When not attacking, put your infantry forces (like pikemen) in a defensive formation for a morale and defense bonus.
- For the best defense (as well as a strong offense), set up a double layer of units in each formation.
- Use terrain to your advantage: station muskets and cannons on hills to destroy enemy formations.
- You can use your gates to crush enemy units, but be careful to catch the ones that slip through.



A fleet of Yachts can do massive damage to an unsuspecting enemy.

- When your buildings are under attack, surprise the enemy by pressing the "delete" key. Doing so will decrease your building's health by 10%, causing it to quickly self-destruct and damage any units caught nearby.
- "Delete" cannons that you can't protect to prevent them from being captured.
- Use howitzers to pick off enemies attempting to broach your walls. Their arcing shot clears any wall, just like a mortar, but has a larger area of damage. After destroying a formation with two or three howitzers, send musketeers or dragoons to out-flank them.
- Fortify the path to your base by setting up cannons on surrounding hills. If you find that your opponent is sending a massive invasion force, charge the middle of his force with a substantial number of small units before they reach your base to create havoc and weaken his attack.

CHEATER'S CORNER

COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS

Battles not going your way? Crush the enemy with these deadly cheats! During gameplay, press Enter and then type:

AI: Control enemies.
IZMENA: Switch player with Numpad keys 1–9.
GODS: Get help from the gods.
MONEY: Give resources.
MULTITVAR: Press P to access all units.
Resources: Gives you all resources.
Shield: Get infinite cannon.
SUPERVIZOR: Reveal map.
VICTORY: Win the game. (Case-sensitive.)
www: Activates IZMENA, MULTITVAR, and SUPERVIZOR cheats. (Case-sensitive.)

HOSTILE WATERS: ANTAEUS RISING

Run the game with the –setusupthebomb option (Hostile-Waters.exe –setusupthebomb). Now, during the game, hit F8, and then type the following codes (which are case-sensitive) in the console window:

filthylucre 1: Gives 999999EJ.
invulnerable 1: Makes all your units invincible.
revealmap 1: Reveals mission map.
winlevel 1: Successfully complete mission.
enableallmovies 1: Enables all movies in the Cinema menu.

Black & White Multiplay

Playing *Black & White* online means pitting your creature in a battle to the death, where total control is the name of the game. Follow these tips to ensure your place in history!



On the three-god map, control the Tibetan town to grab worshippers from the enemy.

WARM-UP

Before going online, play a few games against the AI. The maps are the same, so you'll learn the islands and start to figure out multiplayer skirmish. On the two-god map you'll find a hill with a Mega Blast miracle dispenser and a bunch of level-three scaffolds. That extra wood can be the key to victory — make sure you're the one who gets to the scaffolds. The three- and four-person maps have a Tibetan town that already has a wonder. These towns can be hard to take, but they're centrally located and boost shield miracles, which are super-important to good gods.

EXPANSION

The way to win a skirmish game is to convert the other gods' towns and destroy their temples. Expansion is the key to victory because a large circle of influence will allow you to attack or convert enemy villages directly. Multiplayer games usually unfold in two phases: grabbing any and all villages that are in your vicinity, and then hammering on the other gods. Some tips:

- As soon as the game starts, send your creature to the closest neighboring town and set him to work at influencing.
- In towns you control, create male breeders as fast as possible and then start ripping up trees for scaffolds. If you find a herd of animals close to town, bookmark the location and start throwing the animals into the storehouse. Also, grab boulders and place them near the crèche of your town for later use.
- The instant you convert a town that your creature is influencing, move the creature to the next town and repeat the breeder/builder/boulder maneuver. As your circle of influence increases you'll be able to help the creature and take towns even faster. This is a race you want to win.

CONFLICT

Once you've grabbed all nearby towns, the next step is to go aggressive on your enemies. Controlling the central town on the three- and four-person maps is key because it will push your circle of influence closer to the other gods. Pick an enemy god you feel is weak and go after him only — as Napoleon and Hitler both learned, it's not wise to fight a two-front war. Once you've begun your attack, send your creature to another one of the enemy's towns. He'll be forced to deal with you and your creature at the same time.

TIP



Here's the most important hill on the two-god map. Find it and get that wood.

EVIL TRICKS

- As soon as your circle of influence is big enough, start grabbing your enemy's people and sacrificing them on your altar. This tactic is especially powerful if you can grab his worshippers.
- If necessary, kill everyone in an enemy town and then import your own disciples. This will cripple the size of the town but will put you in command. It's a great finishing move when a god is down to just a few villages.
- Always focus attacks on the enemy god's worshippers. This severely limits his ability to cast miracles.
- Make your creature play the good-cop/bad-cop role — e.g., have him do evil deeds and then have him heal and be nice for a while. Such back-and-forth is a great way to get oodles of belief.

GOOD MANEUVERS

- Counteract the moves of evil gods by healing, giving food and wood, and shielding your villagers.
- Never underestimate the power of relics. Keep moving them from village to village.
- Have extra people? Make them disciples.
- Expand your nearby villages to the limit and then hang back a bit before making an attack. While you're waiting, increase the size of your villages and up their belief. If possible, make alliances with other gods that are being attacked.

GENERAL RULE OF THUMB: Evil gods have the advantage in skirmish maps, but you *can* win as a good god. Don't give up!

CREATURE TRAINING



Before competing against humans, head over to *www.bwcenter.com* or *www.planetbw.com* and look for what are usually called "sandbox" or "playground" skirmish maps. These maps are great for training a creature and usually have a village, all the miracles in the game, and no enemy gods. Spend some time on these maps, teaching your creature all of the applicable spells. Be careful when it comes to teaching your creature the higher-level offensive spells because he may become too dangerous to keep in a village — which will be a bad thing in most skirmish battles.

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PC Gamer
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Computer Gaming World
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Things You Should Know About...

Violence in Games



The IDSA is *the* source for accurate data on the entire games industry, and Doug Lowenstein is the man who leads the operation. When the *New York Times* or *Nightline* needs a quote, he's the go-to guy.

■ Game violence may not be quite the same "hot button" issue that it was a year or two ago, but that doesn't mean it's gone away, not by any means. These things tend to be episodic — they ebb and flow based on external events such as school shootings, government or academic studies, or controversy over specific products.

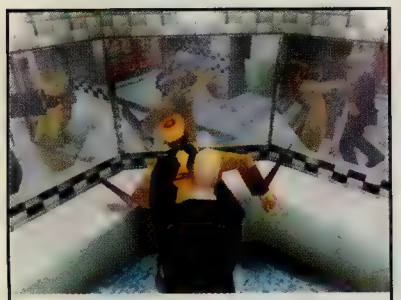
■ I think the public has always been ahead of the politicians and media on this issue: research shows that most people believe that *parents* are primarily responsible for their kids' behavior — that exposure to games is an insignificant factor.

■ The industry's done a very good job of raising awareness about the demographic diversity of the gamer population, and about the wide range of subject matter in games.

■ This industry is *not* dominated by games with significantly violent content.

■ It's a myth that violent PC games lead to violent behavior. Recent studies by such diverse sources as the Australian Government and the Surgeon General of the United States clearly shatter this myth.

■ Yes, a few studies do purport to show such a link, but they are so scientifically and methodologically flawed that they're hard to take seriously.



Though they often get the lion's share of attention, ultraviolent titles (like *Hitman*) aren't the norm in gaming, says Lowenstein.

■ Unfortunately, pressure groups who want to fuel their crusade against violent media embrace those studies, forcing the rest of us to spend time rebutting them.

■ Fact: juvenile crime in particular has actually *declined* over the past five years. If the "violent game" theory had any substance, surely we would see the opposite!

■ As for the voluntary ESRB ratings, consumer acceptance shows they have been an unqualified success. Our surveys show that nearly four out of five people who use the ratings find them helpful in making purchasing decisions.

■ And the industry's commitment to those ratings has been crucial in proving to politicians that we're serious about helping consumers decide which titles are suitable for their particular families — hopefully obviating the need for government ratings or other unconstitutional regulation.

■ Those who have an anti-game agenda are passionate, some are very credible, they have access to the media and to politicians, and they know how to reduce a complex issue to deceptively simple propositions.

■ It only needs another incident like Columbine to galvanize the forces of reaction yet again.

■ I think it's time for gamers to be heard, to speak up, to let their legislators know that they are part of the mainstream, not just a bunch of teenagers. And that they vote, pay taxes, and care passionately about PC games as a compelling, enjoyable form of entertainment.

■ Politicians need to understand that when they attack PC games, there are unwitting "victims" — i.e., their own voting constituents! So let them know that blasting violent games is not a freebie with no political downside — that they, too, may pay a political price for attacking this popular form of entertainment.

■ After all, this is a century in which "interactivity" is one of the defining forms of mass entertainment — every bit as important as films, and quite possibly surpassing them in the near future.

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THE SEASON'S HOTTING UP

As we head full-steam toward the holidays, some big-name games are hitting shelves. We'll have reviews of *Max Payne, Diablo II: Lord of Destruction, Anarchy Online,* and more.

PC GAMER

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Once upon a time, there was a boy named Bob. Bob liked a girl named Sue. But that's neither here nor there because Bob was sent off to war the day of his 18th birthday, and was killed before he could ever tell Sue about his feelings. Sue, on the other hand, lived to the ripe-old age of 97. Her daughter, as it turns out, fell in love with a man named Henry. He died at 27 at the hands of a rogue group of turnips. Carrots are also violent, but not nearly as much as turnips. I know this because when I was 5, many of my best friends were turnips, and they often beat me with carrots. What's up with that? Since then, I've had a very difficult time eating most vegetables, but I still manage to take pleasure in eating carrots and turnips. Isn't that funny? By now you're probably wondering who I am. My name is John, and I am the son of Sue, and this has been my story.

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